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# ETHICAL LANGUAGE;

~~the application of the term~~ an examination  
of the use and meaning of ethical expressions.

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## 1. Introduction.

A very great part of this essay is taken up with the discussion of questions about the ordinary meaning of various words and longer expressions. None the less, this is neither a piece of amateur psychology nor a criticism of uses of words in any literary aspect, but an authentic philosophical study. To give the investigation of meanings the amount of attention I have given is inevitable in any work written from the special philosophical point of view which this essay is intended to illustrate. In reaching this point of view I have been more influenced by the writings and teaching of professor G. E. Moore than by any other single agency. Since I shall often have occasion to refer to professor Moore, and propose now to describe the philosophical point of view I have mentioned, I think it necessary to say that on those points in which I claim to have been influenced by him I can not be sure that anything I say is or ever has been part of what professor Moore thinks; it is specially hard to be sure of this because professor Moore's philosophical work is exceptionally subtle and precise. And I shall be specially liable to inaccuracy in trying to put what may be called a Moorist point of view

in general terms, and to say what is common to the ways in which one would treat different sorts of question.

Professor Moore's philosophical method and point of view are implicit throughout chapters V - X of philosophical studies, appearing by way of their effects on particular questions. The fullest and clearest general account of them is given in a defence of common sense in Contemporary British philosophy II. In section IV of that essay professor Moore wrote 'I am not at all sceptical as to the truth of such propositions as "The earth has existed for many years past", "Many human bodies have each lived for many years upon it", i.e. propositions which assert the existence of material things: on the contrary, I hold that we all know, with certainty, many such propositions to be true. But I am very sceptical as to what, in certain respects, the correct analysis of such propositions is.' Again in section V, 'just as I hold that the proposition "there are and have been material things" is quite certainly true ... so I hold that the proposition "There are and have been many selves" is quite certainly true, but that here again all the analyses of this proposition that have been suggested by philosophers are highly doubtful.' We may say in other words that all or almost all of the



propositions which may be called in a certain sense common sense propositions are certainly true; and that there is no point in enquiring whether such propositions are true, but there are reasons for enquiring how they are to be analysed. Professor Moore spoke of the analyses of propositions. But since most or all of the sort of propositions to be considered are true, we can equally well speak, in a closely related sense, of the analysis of certain facts or classes of facts. Anything which was the analysis of the proposition the earth has existed for many years past would obviously also be the analysis in a closely related sense of the fact which that sentence expresses. My own preference, which need not be justified here, is for avoiding the word proposition as far as possible, and speaking only of facts and the sentences which express them. Instead of saying whether a proposition is true or false, I say what comes to just the same thing, whether a sentence expresses a fact or not. Very often when we are discussing analysis we consider sentences about physical objects around us, such as that is a chair, supposing on a certain occasion this is the actual sentence on which the discussion is turning, then it is of no consequence as a rule whether the sentence as used on that occasion does express a fact,

so long as it is certain that similar sentences used in similar ways do very often express facts. It is immaterial, as a rule, whether I say that is a chair and point at a chair, or say it and point at a table. So in many cases what we are discussing is not the analysis of the fact expressed by a particular sentence, but the analysis of all the facts of a certain class, the class of the facts which could be expressed by sentences having a certain sort of resemblance to a given sentence, and used in a certain way. Supposing we have discovered what is, as professor Moore would say, the analysis of a certain proposition, it will obviously be a perfectly simple thing to define those senses in which we may say, if we prefer, that it is the analysis of a certain fact or set of facts, or that it is the analysis of a certain sentence or a certain meaning. Since as a rule, when we are discussing an analysis, whether a certain sentence does express a fact is no part of what we are asking, there is no need to mention the fact or class of facts that is being analysed. I therefore prefer to speak as a rule of analysing sentences or their meanings rather than propositions or facts. But which of these four it is that we analyse is not a subject for dispute but a matter of taste.

So far I have not tried to say what an analysis is, that is, what we mean by the word. This is a question which has not yet been clearly and decisively settled; but I shall try to say a little about those points connected with it which I think are fairly clear. I do not think professor Moore has ever said in print in exactly what sense he speaks about analysis. But the account I shall give is certainly derived from the method of analysis actually used in his writings and from what he has said in lectures and conversations. When we have found a particular analysis, we have always arrived at some sentence which has the same meaning as a sentence which we began by considering, or at the means of constructing such a sentence, and which has the further character of giving the analysis of the fact or proposition or sentence which we were trying to analyse. We may say if we choose that this sentence we have arrived at is the analysis we required; whether we say that it is or that it gives the analysis is indifferent. In order to define analysis we have to decide what the additional character is on account of which some sentences having the same meaning as a given sentence are analyses of it and others are not. The sense in which I am speaking of sentences having the same meaning is, I think,

a very ordinary familiar sense; the sense in which an accurate translation has the same meaning as its original. Whether two sentences have the same meaning in this sense is a question unaffected by their stylistic or rhetorical differences. I think I can give a comparatively brief definition of having the same meaning. Two sentences have the same meaning in this sense if, supposing one has been used by a certain person on a certain occasion to express a certain fact, then the other could have been used by the same person on the same occasion to express the same fact. I give a much more elaborate definition in my third chapter, which I think may be more correct than this, or at any rate more precise. But whether this definition or the other is the better, I feel sure that this definition expresses a relation which holds between the members of all pairs of sentences which have the same meaning and only between them.

What the additional character is which distinguishes

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I The definition has to have this slightly clumsy form, instead of saying simply that two sentences have the same meaning if they express the same fact, because there are so many sentences which express different facts according to the circumstances of their use, for example, almost all sentences containing demonstrative or personal pronouns. The more elaborate definition is given on pages 115-117.

analysing sentences from other sentences with the same meaning as a given sentence is much harder to say. There are two characters which seem to be common to all the sentences which there is good reason to think are analyses; first, each is longer than the sentence it is supposed to analyse, and second, when one has seen that the two sentences have the same meaning one understands the analysed sentence better or more clearly than before. The first of these characters suggests one sort of definition, the second another. The first suggests that perhaps an analysing sentence always has more parts, each of which in some sense or other corresponds to an element of the fact which would be expressed by the sentence, than the analysed sentence has.<sup>2</sup> This seems to be the sort of account which

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2 Professor Moore has made a suggestion of this sort in discussion, and said in a letter in April 1932, 'I think one can say that "x is male and at least one of his parents was also a parent of y" contains more words each of which has a separate meaning than does "x is brother of y"; and that you would not be giving an analytic definition of "brother" by saying "x is brother of y = def. x is male and at least one of his parents etc.", unless this were the case.' Professor Moore has also distinguished in discussion between the analysis of propositions and the analysis of concepts, and would, I think, say that the illustration given in my quotation is a suggested analysis of a concept. I do not know how far there would have to be a formal difference between the ways in which one would define analysis of these two sorts, or whether professor Moore would think, as I am inclined to think, that the analysing of a concept and the analysing of a proposition can be defined in the same way. If ethical expressions can be analysed, the analysis of them will generally be analysis of concepts.

was given in Logical constructions by John Wisdom, in Mind 1931-3;<sup>3</sup> though it is hard to be sure that I have classified Mr. Wisdom's opinions rightly. His work is the most thorough and detailed attempt I know to answer questions connected with analysis, and shows great insight into those questions. I think I agree with the tendency of his theory, but it is expressed by means of a very intricate technical vocabulary, and I have certainly not understood everything that he said. It may be possible to give a formal definition of the way in which the parts of an analysing sentence correspond more closely to the elements of a fact than the parts of an analysed sentence. If this were done, it might happen that two sentences had the same meaning and stood in this other defined relation, and yet one seemed not to understand the analysed sentence any better as a result of recognising this. Because of this possibility, which seems to be realised in some cases which would fall within any formal definition which has been given, a further clause may be needed in the definition, of the sort that the second of the two characters I mentioned suggests. But I think it is a matter of choice whether

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3 Mind, April, Oct. 1931, Oct. 1932, Jan., April 1933.

we insert such a clause. The alleged analyses which do not seem to help us to understand what they analyse any better than before are presumably superfluous because they concern a subject about which most people's minds happen already to be fairly clear. We may if we choose define an analysis as a sentence which not only in a certain way corresponds more closely to a fact than some other, but also clears our minds; or we may, as I think is more convenient, not include this latter clause in our definition, but distinguish between those analyses which are helpful and those which happen not to be.

Evidently the aim of philosophers who take the sort of point of view I have described is in a certain sense not to discover new facts, but to elucidate familiar facts. They do, of course, hope to discover some new facts, namely facts that some sentence or other is an analysis; but only facts which stand in a certain special relation to facts already familiar.

What I have said so far very likely differs in many points from what professor Moore would say on the same subject, but it may none the less be called a conventional account of analysis and analytic philosophy. There is one point I should like to mention briefly in which I am somewhat doubtful about the correctness of this conventional

account. My doubt on this point seems to have been shared by the late F. P. Ramsey, who wrote in one of his short papers,<sup>4</sup> ' I do not think it is necessary to say with Moore that the definitions explain what we have hitherto meant by our propositions, but rather that they show how we intend to use them in the future.' It seems to me probable that sentences do not either have fixed or accepted meanings or not have them, but that they differ in the degree of fixity or acceptance of their meanings. When we have found something which is what we call the analysis of a certain sentence whose meaning has a low degree of fixity, I am doubtful whether it is really true that the analysis has the same meaning as the analysed sentence. Rather, I am inclined to think, the analysis expresses a fact, or could express a fact of a certain class, which was not familiar to us before, but which was linked in some way or other with the circumstances in which the analysed sentence would be used, although the analysed sentence would not have been used to express that fact or a fact of that class. I give as an incidental part of my third chapter<sup>5</sup> a slightly more

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4 The foundations of mathematics page 262,  
last papers, F philosophy .

5 On pages 81-3 and 90-2.



precise but very conjectural account of the way in which sentences may perhaps differ in the degree of fixity of their meanings, and the way in which an analysis may perhaps sometimes give, not the meaning of an analysed sentence, but a meaning which it is somehow or other proper to substitute for it. When the meaning of an analysed sentence has a high degree of fixity, as perhaps we can secure that it generally has, I think the sentence which would be called its analysis very likely does have the same meaning.

In forming my view of ethics I have again been more influenced by the writings of professor Moore than by any other single agency. But there are many of professor Moore's opinions about ethics, as there are not in other subjects, of whose truth I feel doubtful. Professor Moore's ethical theories are most fully and systematically expressed in Principia Ethica; and various parts of them are treated in detail in Ethics, in chapters VIII and X of Philosophical studies, and in his contribution to the symposium is goodness a quality ? in proc. Arist. Soc. sup.vol. XI, 1932. In this last paper he said, on page 127 that in Principia Ethica 'all the supposed proofs' that goodness was indefinable 'were certainly fallacious.' So professor Moore's ethical opinions have

certainly changed to some extent in the thirty years since Principia Ethica was written. But I think their general outline has probably remained the same. The part of his ethical theory on which the rest turns is that which I have just mentioned, namely that goodness in a certain sense is indefinable and is a quality. This particular part of his theory is that about which I am most sceptical, and it is examined and criticised in detail in my second chapter. The remainder of his ethical theory I am, within a certain limitation, much more inclined to favour. I shall try to give an outline of that part of his theory which I find convincing, and say how it is related to the part I have mentioned. It is possible that I shall not succeed in stating a theory which is exactly what professor Moore has at any time thought; but even so I shall be satisfied if I can express the theory which I have arrived at as a result of reading what professor Moore has written, and which does seem to me very convincing, but for a certain difficulty which I have just referred to and shall shortly explain.

This theory is that all ethical expressions can be defined, or at any rate explained or interpreted, in terms of one sense or group of senses of the word good, that sense or that group in which good has the same sense as the phrase intrinsically good, and which according to professor

Moore is indefinable. Supposing the use of the word good which I am trying to identify proved to consist of several different senses, then one would probably have to say that there was one of these senses in terms of which all the other members of the group could be defined, and likewise all other expressions, either directly or by <sup>reference to</sup> ~~means of~~ the group as a set of alternatives.

~~Some of the members of the group.~~ The way in which according to this theory such words as right and duty would be defined or explained is particularly striking.

In Principia Ethica, chapter V section 89, professor Moore wrote 'what I wish to point out is that "right" does and can mean nothing but "cause of a good result", and is thus identical with "useful"; whence it follows that the end always will justify the means, and that no action which is not justified by its results can be right.' In this and other statements professor Moore quite plainly claimed that rightness was definable in terms of goodness. Mr. W. D. Ross has pointed out, on page 10 of the right and the good, that professor Moore had perhaps ceased to think that rightness could be defined in terms of goodness when he wrote his later book, Ethics; but that even if he had given up thinking this he continued to think that whether an act produced a good result was a test of its rightness, that is, that there was some character definable in terms of goodness which all right acts and only right

acts possessed. In that case I should say that rightness was not to be defined, but, in the words I used above, explained or interpreted, in terms of goodness. I think professor Moore's definition of rightness which I have quoted is rather vague, and I think that as a matter of fact the word right undoubtedly has a number of different uses in which it may be called an ethical expression, and of which not more than one or one group could possibly be defined by professor Moore's definition. The sort of theory which professor Moore has expressed has been named by Hastings Rashdall ideal utilitarianism,<sup>6</sup> and by Mr. Ross agathistic utilitarianism.<sup>7</sup> These names have been given because the theory formally resembles ordinary, that is, hedonistic, utilitarianism, but differs from that theory in that in ideal utilitarianism a certain indefinable character takes the place taken by pleasure in the older theory. The theory originally called utilitarianism had a kind of multiple adaptation, which made it possible for the form or structure of its account of rightness to be incorporated in other theories which avoid the evident mistakes made

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6     The theory of good and evil, book I ch. VII  
§ VIII.

7     The right and the good, page 9.

by Bentham and Mill about goodness and pleasure. Any theory which contains this formal or structural element might be called utilitarian in a more inclusive sense. All theories which are utilitarian in this sense give as a test of the rightness or wrongness of any action the extent to which some character, for example goodness or pleasure, has occurred or would occur or be likely to occur in the world as a result of it, in comparison with the extent to which the same character would occur as a result of alternative actions;<sup>8</sup> and they give this test either on the ground that to call an action right is simply to say that it is related in a certain way to the occurrence of a certain character in the world, or on the ground that all right actions and only right actions are related in a certain way to the occurrence of that character.

I believe in ideal utilitarianism to this extent. I

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<sup>8</sup> This is the most compendious way I can find of putting a theory of the sort I am considering in the most general form. If I spoke of the extent to which the results of an action display some character, for example, goodness, or of the goodness, or whatever it may be, of the results, I should not allow for the possibility that the character in question belonged to the action itself, or to wholes of which either the action itself, or previous and simultaneous happenings, or both, were parts.

feel sure that any theory which both denies the truth of every sort of utilitarianism, and gives some interpretation of the meanings of the words right and good in their ethical uses, is false; and I feel sure that every sort of hedonistic utilitarianism, whether to the effect that intrinsic goodness can be defined in terms of pleasure, or that something to do with pleasure is a criterion of the presence of some other character, called intrinsic goodness, is false. But both professor Moore's attempt, and all other attempts I know of, to explain the meaning of such expressions as intrinsic goodness seem to me very dubious. This is the limitation or difficulty I referred to above. In my third chapter I suggest, without stating it as at all certain, a radical kind of scepticism about ethical expressions, to the effect that the meaning of those expressions can not be explained simply because they are meaningless. Supposing this sceptical theory were true, as I think it may be, it is hard to say what reason I should have for favouring some kind of utilitarianism more than other false theories, although I should certainly be inclined to favour it. But suppose we use the word utilitarianism, not as a name for a definite type of theory, but simply for a practical maxim, to the

effect that in considering questions about conduct it pays, or is worth while, to give attention to results, then I think I may say that I am certainly a utilitarian in the sense that I believe in that maxim, even if it is difficult to say exactly how such a proceeding pays. And there is one further point about which I think I am much more inclined to agree with professor Moore than with most upholders of theories contrary to his. It seems to me that if such words as good and right in their ethical uses have meanings which we can explain, then it is very probable that their meanings can not be explained wholly in natural terms; and I am even more prone to think that no naturalistic definitions of them that have been suggested and that I have heard of are correct.

I am afraid that the sense in which I write about ethical expressions or ethical uses of expressions may not be very precise. I assume throughout this essay that it is fairly clear what the expressions and uses are to which I refer in this way: and I think probably it is clear, except about a few doubtful cases. But I should express myself much more clearly if I could define the sense in which I call these expressions or uses ethical, by saying that they are expressions which have a certain

sort of meaning. This definition I am precluded from giving by my uncertainty, upon which this whole essay turns, whether they have any meaning in the ordinary sense, and if they have, then what sort. But I am afraid that I occasionally use language which suggests that I do know part of the definition of the sense in which I call certain expressions ethical; I think perhaps I sometimes write as though if an expression stood for, or could be defined in terms of, a non-natural character, it would be an ethical expression. I think there may be an ordinary sense of the word ethical such that if an expression had the sort of meaning I have described it would follow that it was an ethical expression, and a sense such that to call an expression ethical is to say that it has such a meaning. But if so, it is not in either of these senses that I generally call expressions ethical; I suppose my usual practice is to call an expression or a use ethical if it is one which ethical philosophers have often discussed, or of a sort which they have often discussed. But this answer of course makes it hard to settle the question who ethical philosophers are.

I tried to explain in outline in the earlier part of this chapter the procedure which I called analysing. The extent to which this procedure can be applied to ethical questions is unfortunately very uncertain. If a clear



and conclusive account could be given of the meaning of one single ethical expression, whether in the form of an analysis of it or the discovery that no analysis of it was possible, as professor Moore has suggested about goodness, we might hope that analysis on the regular plan could be applied to other expressions, which we should hope to be able to define partly by means of the expression first defined. But so far, it seems to me, no such clear and conclusive account has been given of any expression. Accordingly the greater part of this essay consists, not of attempts at analysis, but ~~of~~ preliminary investigations to discover whether analysis is possible. These investigations consist in part of criticism of suggested analyses of certain expressions, and in part of the testing of hypotheses from which it would follow that analysis is not possible for any ethical expressions.

There is an assumption about the use and meaning of words which is very commonly made by analytic philosophers, and which I am afraid is often made in this essay, but about whose justification I am very doubtful. This assumption is that as a rule it is possible to make clear exactly what sense or use of an expression one wants to consider in some quite simple way, for example by saying that it is that use or sense in which the expression in question has the same sense as a certain other expression,

or that it is the sense the expression would have if a certain sentence preceded it, or the sense it would have if it were used during the occurrence of a certain physical condition, or by mentioning some other single circumstance which might accompany its use. It is assumed that either by connecting an expression with some other, or by indicating by some simple means an occasion on which or a written context in which it might be used, we can identify what is commonly called a particular sense of an expression, in the sense in which we speak of the police identifying a prisoner. It is difficult to be quite sure how far assumptions like this are justified, because the meaning of expressions about the different senses of an expression has itself not yet been adequately analysed. But I think the general assumption is probably mistaken, although there may be some expressions whose use is specially simple and uniform and whose senses can be identified by such simple means as I have described. I think as a rule the question what sense an expression has on a certain occasion is the question what sense most hearers or readers would be likely to attach to it on that occasion.<sup>9</sup> The sense which hearers or readers attach to an expression probably depends upon a very complex set

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<sup>9</sup> Whether this is so is discussed more fully in my third chapter, on pages 106-8.

of circumstances. If the expression is spoken, the sense which its hearers attach to it will very likely be affected by a great many parts of a preceding conversation, by the tone of the conversation, serious or frivolous, by their knowledge of the speaker's character and interests, by the reasons for which those present have met, by the place, the time of day, or a variety of other causes, or by several of these circumstances. Similarly, if an expression is written or printed, the sense which its readers attach to it may be affected by the whole or many parts of what comes before it in the piece of writing in which it occurs, their knowledge of the writer's opinions, their knowledge of the expression's use by other writers on the same subject, and so on. And I think I have only mentioned causes by which it is reasonable to be affected. Supposing the question to be settled is not what sense an expression has on a particular occasion, that is, what sense would be attached to it by hearers or readers, but in what sense an expression was used or would be used on a particular occasion by a writer or speaker, then I think there is probably just as great a variety of causes which may affect the sense the writer or speaker attaches to it. The sense which is attached to colloquial expressions is perhaps specially affected by the variety of causes I

have described, for the use of colloquial expressions is as a rule exceptionally flexible and adaptable to the needs of the moment. Analytic philosophers have very often made a point of concentrating their attention on colloquial expressions, and trying to analyse the meaning of colloquial expressions in uses which they try to identify. So for their purposes the simple kind of identification I have described is specially likely to be inadequate.

It seems to me that we need to develop a new method of pointing out the sense of an expression to which we want to attend. As it is not yet clear to me ~~how~~ exactly <sup>how</sup> this is to be done, I have not tried to use such a method in this essay. But there are several courses with which it might be useful to experiment. We might construct a whole conversation or a whole argument in which a certain expression would be used, and say that the sense which is to be considered is that in which the expression is used in a particular place in that conversation or argument. Or we might be able to find uses of the expression in some novel or story, by a writer who used words with care, in which it seemed to have the required sense; we should then say that the sense to be considered was that in which the expression was used in a particular place in that book or story, and

it would be understood that in order to discover precisely what sense was in question it was necessary to read the whole or a large part of the work referred to. Or we might refer to a large number of passages in books in each of which a certain expression seemed to have the same sense. Very likely there are many other methods by which it may perhaps be possible to point out exactly what sense of an expression is under discussion. I am sure that some method or other which shows the sense of an expression by much more elaborate means than are generally used is very often needed.

In the second chapter of this essay as I have said above, I examine and criticise professor G. E. Moore's theory about the meaning of such expressions as intrinsically good. Professor Moore's theory does not give an analysis of goodness, since it is to the effect that goodness is indefinable; but it may be called in a sense a theory about analysis, for it would show, if it were true, what place goodness can take in the analysis of other expressions. In my third chapter I enquire whether all ethical expressions can be analysed in a particular way in which it has often been supposed that they can, namely the naturalistic way; I suggest that perhaps they can not be analysed but can be explained in that way, and I put forward a hypothesis under which all

ethical expressions would be in a certain sense meaningless, and it would follow that they can not be analysed. In my fourth chapter I examine the meanings of various expressions about reason, which have not up to this point been specifically included in the scope of what has been said; for many of these expressions I suggest analyses or describe ways in which they could be analysed, and try to show that they are always to be analysed in terms of natural characters unless they contain such a word as good. In my concluding chapter I consider the way in which it may be reasonable for our use of ethical expressions to be affected by the considerations that have been put forward; and I enquire whether we can discover typical states of affairs which commonly accompany the use of ethical expressions, whether or not they give us the means of defining those expressions; and whether ethical expressions have any special and characteristic use in those situations in which people present can assume that they have a certain community of purpose or interest.

II.

## 2 INTRINSIC GOODNESS as a QUALITY.

The account given by Professor Moore of one or one group of our uses of the words good and goodness, that use or group, namely, in which these words are used in the same senses in which we use the phrases intrinsically good and intrinsic goodness, is that goodness in this sense is a quality. On pages 10 and XIII of the third impression of Principia Ethica he used the words ' "good" denotes a simple and indefinable quality,' and 'denotes one unique simple object of thought.' On page 126 of Is Goodness a Quality (Proc. Arist. Soc. Sup. Vol. XI) he said 'what I meant by saying that "good" denoted a quality I think I can say quite simply. I meant merely that the character of being worth having for its own sake was a character and was not a relational property'. I shall try to discover first what professor Moore meant when he called goodness a quality, and next whether what he meant was true.

The clearest indication known to me which professor Moore has given in print of the way in which he used the word quality in Principia Ethica is in the third of my quotations. I think I understand how he was there using

the word character, and I shall try to explain his use there, although I cannot define it. If I say that there are such things as characters in that sense, I am not stating a philosophical theory, but am saying something quite obvious to anyone who understands my use of the word, perhaps something tautological. If I say the carpet is red I ascribe a character in this sense to the carpet; if I say this carpet is too big for the room I ascribe <sup>a</sup> character to the carpet and also another character to the room; if I say if it rains we shall get wet I ascribe characters to rain and to us. If there are such facts as sentences like these would express it follows that there are characters in this sense. The word property is I think also sometimes used in this sense. Suppose redness were a quality in professor Moore's sense, then we could also say that the character of being red is a character and is not a relational property. And since under professor Moore's definition every character must be either a quality or a relational property, it is pretty clear that the characters ascribed in my second and third sentences would be of the latter and not the former sort. If I am right in thinking that professor Moore was using property in the same sense in which he was using character, then the definition of quality which he gives is simply that a quality is a



non-relational character.

But this definition does not I think suffice to show exactly how professor Moore was using the word quality. This use can perhaps be further explained by considering his statement that ' "good" is a simple notion, just as "yellow" is a simple notion', and a passage of which I have already quoted part, 'there is . . . no intrinsic difficulty in the contention that "good" denotes a simple and indefinable quality. There are many other instances of such qualities. Consider yellow, for example.'

(Principia Ethica pages 7 and 10). From these passages we can add two parts to professor Moore's account of goodness; he not only thought that goodness was a non-relational character, but also that it was something simple, and that there was some analogy between it and yellowness. What exactly is the effect of these additions depends upon the ways in which professor Moore was using the words simple and yellow. It seems to me that simple has several different senses, and yellow perhaps more than one. But it is fairly clear that yellow has one single sense or group of closely connected senses in which it is far more commonly used than in any other way. If I say the carpet was yellow, or I have a yellow tie, I am using the word in this ordinary sense. To consider this sense may

help us to see how professor Moore was using the word simple. For there is a sense or group of senses of simple in which yellowness in this ordinary sense is certainly not simple. To say that the carpet was yellow has the same meaning as to say there is some shade of yellow which was the shade of the carpet; thus yellowness in the ordinary sense is something general or determinable, not completely determinate, and it is therefore in a certain sense not simple. In the sense in which yellowness is not simple, the determinate shade of yellow, on account of whose occurrence a statement about yellowness is true, is simple. In what sense would professor Moore have said that yellowness was simple? He may have been using the word yellow as though it stood for a determinate shade of yellow, and have intended to say that it was simple in the sense I have just tried to distinguish. Or he may have been using simple in another sense, some sense for example in which to call a thing simple is to say that it is not composed of parts, or that it is not a conjunction of several characters. In that case he may have wanted to say that yellowness either in the ordinary sense or in the other sense I have suggested was not composed of parts, or was not a conjunction of several characters. Each of these statements is clearly true.

To discover in what sense professor Moore said that goodness was simple we must consider the effects of his comparison with yellowness. If the comparison was with yellowness in the ordinary sense, professor Moore either did not intend to say that goodness was simple in the first sort of sense to which I drew attention or made the mistake of thinking that yellowness was simple in that sense; and I think the latter alternative unlikely, as I think it unlikely that he thought yellowness in the ordinary sense a determinate character. Now it seems to me, though it is hard to be sure on such a point, that the only senses of the word simple which could be relevant in a discussion of this kind fall within one or the other of the groups I have distinguished. If this is so, professor Moore either intended to say merely that goodness was not composed of parts or was not a conjunction of several characters, or was using the word yellow otherwise than in what I have called the ordinary sense. Suppose the latter alternative were true, it would be compatible with the truth of the former, but also with possibilities incompatible with the former. For if professor Moore was using the word yellow to stand for a determinate shade, he may none the less have intended to say merely that goodness was not composed of parts or a conjunction of characters, but he may have

intended to say that it was simple in the first sense which I pointed out, the sense in which a determinate shade may be simple, but an indeterminate character is not. It seems to me that if anything is simple in this sense it follows that it is also not composed of parts and not a conjunction of characters. I therefore think it likely that in any case part of what professor Moore intended to say or of what followed, if that is different, from what he intended to say, was that goodness was not composed of parts or not a conjunction of several characters; and I think it fairly clear that, if he was using the word yellow in its ordinary sense, this was all he intended to say in calling goodness simple.

But I do not feel sure that professor Moore was not using the word yellow otherwise than in the ordinary sense, whether as though yellow were a determinate shade or in some other way. If so, he may have wanted to say that yellowness and goodness were simple in a sense in which only a completely determinate character can be, and consequently that goodness was not, as is yellowness in the ordinary sense, something general or determinable. I do not know whether there is any sense in which the word yellow could properly have been used, other than the ordinary sense, so that yellowness would not be a determinate shade, but it seems to me not. I suspect that

yellowness in the ordinary sense may be a relational character, and therefore not a quality in professor Moore's sense; but I do not propose to go into this question, as I am inclined to think that professor Moore did intend to speak as though yellowness were a determinate shade, and as though goodness were simple in both the sorts of sense to which I have drawn attention. So my conclusion about professor Moore's meaning is that he thought goodness a non-relational character, that he either thought it not composed of parts or not a conjunction of several characters and that he very likely thought it comparable to a determinate shade on account of whose occurrence a given statement about yellowness would be true, and simple in a sense in which nothing general or determinable can be simple.

There is still one more part of professor Moore's account of goodness which I must examine; it is not a part of his account of what he meant by calling goodness a quality, but it will help me to answer the other question I proposed to consider, namely whether his account of goodness is true. Before answering this question I shall examine one of professor Moore's accounts of what is meant by calling goodness in the sense I am considering intrinsic. In Philosophical Studies on page 260 he said 'to say that a kind of value is "intrinsic" means merely that the

question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question'. Further on he used language which suggests that intrinsic value is not an intrinsic property. And on page 274 he said 'if you could enumerate all the intrinsic properties a given thing possessed, you would have given a complete description of it, and would not need to mention any predicates of value it possessed.' From these and similar statements and also from numerous statements in Principia Ethica it appears that professor Moore thought that goodness was in some sense or other a non-natural character;<sup>10</sup> this conclusion does not depend upon any close connexion of sense between the phrase intrinsic nature as used above and the word non-natural as used here.

Obviously no comparison is possible between goodness and yellowness so far as goodness is intrinsic in the sense which professor Moore explained. For in the first place yellowness is unquestionably a natural character; and secondly, if anything is yellow you cannot enumerate all that thing's intrinsic properties without in some sense mentioning its yellowness; yellowness is evidently in

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<sup>10</sup> I think expressions like this have some sense in which they are commonly used. I try to define the sense in which I speak of naturalism at the beginning of my third chapter. Using the same terms that I use there, I may say that a non-natural character is a character which can not be mentioned in describing the order of nature, or the things that happen.

some sense an intrinsic character. I spoke of mentioning in some sense, because if, as in fact never happens, you were enumerating all the determinate characters of something, and the thing were yellow, you would not mention by name yellowness, but a determinate shade, or several such shades, from whose occurrence it would follow that the thing was yellow. It seems pretty clear that there is one sense of the phrase intrinsic character or property appropriate to determinate characters, and another appropriate to general characters like yellowness, and that these senses are systematically connected in the following way; if a certain intrinsic determinate character occurs, it follows that a certain intrinsic general character occurs, or a set of such characters interrelated by their degrees of generality, and if a certain intrinsic general character occurs, it follows that one or several of a certain set of intrinsic determinate characters occur, though not that any particular selection occurs. I think that when professor Moore wrote about enumerating all the intrinsic properties of something, and of giving a complete description, he must certainly have intended to speak of intrinsic determinate characters. For the characters which would be enumerated in the way he described would constitute what he called the intrinsic nature of the thing described, upon which

according to him the thing's intrinsic value solely depends. But if the intrinsic nature of a thing were constituted by general characters, things having the same intrinsic nature might differ widely in their intrinsic determinate characters. I am sure that in that case professor Moore would think that they might well differ also in their intrinsic values. So I think it safe to say that he was considering intrinsic determinate characters in the passages I have quoted.

The answer I shall give to my second question is that goodness is not a non-relational character which is not composed of parts nor a conjunction of several characters, and which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and whose possession by something depends solely upon the intrinsic determinate characters of that thing, although it is not itself an intrinsic character. I am not sure that I can give any absolutely conclusive reasons for rejecting the account of goodness which I have attributed to professor Moore, but I can give reasons which I think make his account seem very unpalatable, and of which some are perhaps conclusive against it. The things which professor Moore thought intrinsically good are without exception complexes or wholes containing parts, as indeed, I should say, are all the things which are ever thought intrinsically good. For



example in chapter VI of Principia Ethica he described personal affection and aesthetic enjoyments as by far the greatest goods with which we are acquainted; and all instances of personal affection or aesthetic enjoyment are certainly complex happenings or states of affairs. ~~unlike~~ ~~unlike~~ I shall suggest in the first place that no whole has any character which is a quality and simple in the sort of sense I have described, and that no such character can in any circumstances occur in the world unless it occurs as an element of an atomic fact, secondly that the word good is not used to stand for such a character, and thirdly that we do not find the sort of evidence we should expect for the occurrence in the world of any such character which is also a non-natural ethical character of complex wholes.

My first objection to professor Moore's sort of opinion is, I am inclined to think, the most cogent, if it is sound; but I am not sure of its soundness. I may divide it into a consideration of the nature of complexes, and a consideration of the nature of simple non-relational characters. The first of these considerations can be put very shortly; it is simply that, as it seems to me, no complex whole can have any character at all which is not composed of parts nor a conjunction of several characters and which is a non-relational character, and therefore none can have such a character which is also a non-natural

character its possession of which depends solely on its intrinsic nature. I am here, I think, using the word complex in such a sense that a whole is complex or is a complex if it is composed of parts, or if it has any intrinsic character which is a conjunction of several characters; if a whole has the former of these characters it probably follows that it also has the latter, so that I think the latter alone might give the definition. In order to see this point clearly, we may ask ourselves whether any whole which has some intrinsic conjunctive character in the sense given above can also have a non-relational non-composite and non-conjunctive character which is a character of the whole as a whole, and not merely of some element of it. It seems to me that the answer must be, no. Or we may ask ourselves whether any complex whole ever has any non-relational non-composite and non-conjunctive character other than goodness, and whether if not we can think of any such character which might belong to a complex whole, in the sense that it makes sense, although it is false, to say of a certain whole that it has that character. I think that again the answer to either question must be, no. To ask such questions as these perhaps comes to the same thing as asking whether complex wholes can as wholes have what would ordinarily be called qualities. I think also that to consider in

this way the nature of complexes may come to the same thing as considering the nature of simple non-relational characters, to which I shall proceed; but I am not sure about this point, and in any case think it useful to approach the topic from either end.

The second part of my first objection is the part of my criticism upon which I should wish to put most emphasis if I had entirely clear insight into the questions involved, and could see that this objection really has the force that I am prone to think it has<sup>11</sup>. It seems to me that a non-relational character which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and which, as appears to follow from the last clause, is non-composite and non-conjunctive, can only occur in the world if it occurs as an element of an atomic fact. I put what I have to say in this form for the reason that it is pretty clear that such a character, and in fact any character, can be an element of a non-atomic or molecular fact, but in each case it only is so, it seems to me, because it is an element of some atomic fact or other. So to each occurrence of such a character in a non-atomic fact there corresponds an occurrence of it in an atomic fact, and the same occurrence in an atomic fact may correspond to a large number of occurrences in non-atomic facts, and the

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<sup>11</sup> The argument which I have based on a connexion between simple non-relational characters and atomic facts was suggested to me by remarks made in conversation by Mr. A.J. Ayer, though I have no reason to think that he would agree with anything that I say.

relation between atomic and non-atomic occurrences is probably a one  $\rightarrow$  many relation.

The theory of atomic facts, and the vocabulary connected with it, is by this time comparatively familiar. The theory is expressed in various parts of Mr. L. Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-philosophicus. I shall not venture to define the expression atomic fact, but I think I see how it is commonly used. It is not easy to give an example of an atomic fact, but I propose to say what I have to say by means of an example which is sometimes suggested in discussions. It appears that the only examples we can find are those which can be taken from an individual person's sense-field; and the sort of facts we have to consider, if they are to be expressed, can only be expressed by means of expressions of a sort which one can only intelligibly address to one's self. Suppose I consider my own visual field at some moment at which it contains a uniformly coloured red sense-datum with definite limits, I can, if I choose, express to myself a certain fact by the words this is here now; if I used these words so that this stood for the determinate shade of red which belonged to the sense-datum, here stood for the situation of that shade, or the area which it filled, and now for the time at which that shade was filling that area, it

is sometimes suggested that I should be expressing an atomic fact.<sup>12</sup> The sort of use of these words about which this suggestion would be made can only be made clear if the sense in which I have spoken of a word standing for something can be made clear; and this I find difficult to explain. It seems to me that the sort of use of these words which is in question is in accordance with the ordinary use of English, whereas it would not be in accordance with that ordinary use if the words this or here were being used to stand for something in that sense or those senses in which the word red or the phrase in the middle of my visual field may stand for something. The sort of use of the words this is here now in which it would be suggested that they might express an atomic fact is sometimes described by saying that the words this, here and now would be used as logically proper names. It seems to me that if we could explain what an atomic fact is and show that a certain sentence would express an atomic fact, we might be able to define logically proper names, or what we might call atomic names, as words used in a particular way in expressing an atomic fact; or if we could define logically proper or

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12 I am not sure of the original author of this suggestion. I first heard it in discussions in which professor Moore was taking part, and I think professor Moore attributed it to the late F. P. Ramsey.

atomic names we might be able to define atomic facts as facts expressed by sentences in which names of that sort were combined in a certain way.

There are many difficulties connected with the expression atomic fact and the opinion that there are such things, and it is not easy to separate difficulties arising from incomplete analysis from difficulties which are only felt because of the awkwardness of considering facts which cannot be communicated and sentences which cannot be addressed to another person. If I had the solution of these difficulties I should give it, but as it is I think it suffices here to say that I think there are such things as atomic facts, and that I think the sentence this is here now, or something like it, could probably be used in accordance with the ordinary use of English to express an atomic fact. I am not certain that this is the right sentence to use for an illustration. Suppose that in my visual field at some moment there is a uniformly coloured red sense-datum with definite limits, touching and lying on the left of a uniformly coloured blue sense-datum with definite limits; then I can, if I choose, express to myself a certain fact by the words this is now thus to that, or is now related thus, using the word this in such a way as to stand for the red sense-datum, not for its colour, that to stand for the

blue sense-datum, and thus to stand for the determinate spatial relation of one sense-datum to the other, in the sense in which I spoke of the words in the other sentence standing for certain things. It might be suggested that this sentence also would express an atomic fact; and I am not sure that it would not, but I think it would be difficult to say exactly how the fact it would express would be related to the fact expressed by the other sentence. I want at present to draw attention to a difference between the ways in which the word this is used in the two sentences. In the first sentence it stands for a determinate shade, which is what has commonly been called a universal; in the second sentence it stands for a sense-datum, which is not a universal, but which one is naturally inclined to call a particular. To define or explain the use of such words as particular and universal is specially hard, and very often the only possible course seems to be to point out the sort of thing which has one or another of the characters which are being spoken of. I think the use of universal is much easier to understand than the use of particular, for it seems to me pretty clear that a determinate non-relational character, or a determinate relation, is a universal, whereas I find it much harder to say what sort of thing would be a particular; whether an indeterminate character or a complex relational character is a universal

I am doubtful. However it seems as though in the first of the two sentences I am considering the word this does stand for a non-relational determinate character, and for a universal; whether any word in either sentence stands for a particular is more doubtful, as is also the question what sort of thing can be said about the other words in the sentences comparable to saying about this in the first sentence that it stands for a universal. It seems to me that if we are to say, about all the words, or all the words other than is, in sentences like these, something comparable to saying about this in the first sentence that it stands for a universal, we shall need to distinguish more different kinds of thing, which can be said in this way than have so far been distinguished; I doubt whether it is appropriate to say of here, for example, in the first sentence, either that it stands for a particular or for a universal, and I am sure it is not appropriate to say either of now. If words like particular and universal are to keep their utility I think we must introduce others of the same kind. It seems to me that perhaps here, for example, as used in the first sentence, stands for something which is neither



a particular nor a universal, but which we may call a setting.<sup>13</sup> I wish it were possible to say clearly what is meant by saying that a word is like or of the same kind as particular and universal, but at present I do not see how to do this. I think it possible that the late W. E. Johnson's uses of such words as tie have been misunderstood by those who have criticised those uses,<sup>14</sup> and that he was trying to introduce words which should be comparable to particular and universal in the way I am speaking of. Thus I think we might say that the word is sometimes, and perhaps in the sentences I am considering, stands for a tie in the same sort of way in which this in the first sentence stands for a universal. To say that there are ties would, if I am right, not be to state a philosophical theory any more than to say that there are characters would be so, in the sense in which I suggested early in this chapter that to say that there are characters is not to state a philosophical theory.

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<sup>13</sup> Professor Moore has, I think, made a suggestion in conversation, to the effect that it is a mistake to suppose that an element of an atomic fact must be either a particular or a universal.

<sup>14</sup> For example, by the late F. P. Ramsey, in what he said on page 115 of the foundations of mathematics. For Johnson's use of the word tie, see his Logic I page 10 and elsewhere; and for an interpretation of it John Wisdom's Logical Constructions I § 3, Mind April 1931.

I have digressed some distance from the subject of simple non-relational characters for the sake of making a little clearer my use of the phrase atomic fact. It is fairly clear that what the word this would stand for, if it were used in the way I have described in such a sentence as this is here now, would be a non-relational character and a determinate shade, simple therefore in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple; and that it would be non-composite and non-conjunctive, whether this follows from the previous clause or not. Suppose there is a situation such as I have described in which someone or other can and does use the sentence this is here now to express an atomic fact, then I should say, in words which I have used above without explaining them, that a determinate shade of red is occurring as an element of an atomic fact. But obviously there may be an atomic fact of this sort, and similarly an occurrence of a determinate shade, without anyone expressing the fact, and without a causal possibility of anyone expressing the fact. For the sort of fact I am speaking of is defined as a fact which could be expressed by words of a certain kind, that is, a fact such that if anyone in a certain situation used those words in a certain

sense he would be expressing it. And it is natural to suppose that there are countless facts of this sort which nobody ever dreams of expressing; for it is natural to suppose that the whole of the sense-field of every human being is in a certain sense constituted by countless facts of this sort. There are countless facts the expression of which, in the way I have described by means of such words as I have suggested, was logically possible, in the sense that it makes sense, though it is as a rule false, to say of each that someone did so express it.

I have suggested above that a non-relational character which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and non-composite and non-conjunctive, if it occurs as an element of a non-atomic fact only does so because it also occurs as an element of some atomic fact. I can give as a test of the truth of what I say a very simple question. Does it make sense to say that a certain non-relational character, which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and non-composite and non-conjunctive, occurs as an element of a non-atomic fact, but not because it also occurs as an element of some atomic fact? <sup>15</sup> in other, and I think less clear, words, is such a thing logically possible? I think I can explain in what sense I am

It may, I think, suffice to ask whether it makes sense to say that a non-relational character of the sort described occurs as an element of a non-atomic fact and there is no atomic fact of which it is also an element.

speaking of a character occurring as an element of one fact because it is an element of some other. A character occurs as an element of a non-atomic fact because it occurs as an element of some atomic fact if it occurs as an element of the non-atomic fact, either because one or more atomic facts, of which it is an element, are parts of the non-atomic fact, or because the non-atomic fact is <sup>(that is, is a truth-function of)</sup> in a certain sense about one or more atomic facts of which the character in question is an element. So my question is, does it make sense to say that a certain non-relational character such as is described above occurs as an element of a non-atomic fact, but not because any part of that non-atomic fact is an atomic fact of which the character is an element, nor because the <sup>non-</sup>atomic fact <sup>(in the above sense)</sup> is about any atomic fact of which the character is an element? It seems to me that the answer to this question is, no.

I have already suggested, in the first part of my first objection, that a character of the sort described can not belong to a complex whole. If I am right in saying what I have just said, a much clearer reason can be given for this assertion. If any complex whole had any character of the sort described, the fact that the whole had that character would be a non-atomic fact, and

the character would be an element of that fact, and probably of other facts, simply because it belonged to the whole in question. So if I am right in suggesting that a non-relational character of the sort described can only be an element of a non-atomic fact either because at least one atomic fact is a part of the non-atomic fact or because the non-atomic fact is about at least one atomic fact, it follows that no character of the sort described can belong to any complex whole. It follows that either intrinsic goodness is never a character of a complex whole, or it is not a non-relational character, which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and non-composite and non-conjunctive; whereas professor Moore suggested both that goodness was sometimes a character of complex wholes and that it was a non-relational character of the sort described. I think that if my suggestions are sound it would probably also follow from the same considerations that a quality in the ordinary sense can not belong to a complex whole.

I suppose that anyone who admitted the validity of these considerations would be likely to say that goodness does belong to complex wholes<sup>s</sup>, but is not a quality or a non-relational character of the sort described, rather than the other way round. But it would be possible to take the

other line, and say that intrinsic goodness is a non-relational character of the sort described, but does not belong to complex wholes, and only occurs as an element of any fact if it occurs as an element of an atomic fact. I doubt whether professor Moore could consistently say this, because I do not see how a character could be an element of an atomic fact which was intrinsic in the special sense in which he thought that goodness was intrinsic, that is, which was not an intrinsic character of anything, but which was such that ~~whether~~ whether something possessed it depended solely on that thing's intrinsic nature.

I have tried to show that there can be no such thing as what professor Moore called goodness. I have not yet considered whether what is commonly called goodness is a quality or a non-relational character of the sort described; my answer to this question will form my second objection to professor Moore's sort of opinion. It seems from what I have said under the title of my first objection that a ~~non~~-relational character of the sort described can only occur in the world if it occurs as an element of an atomic fact. So I may ask first whether the word good really is used to stand for a character of which this is true, and secondly, if we do not allow this conclusion which I have put forward in my first objection, but admit

that a character of the sort described can be an element of an atomic fact, whether the word good is used to stand for a character which could be an element of an atomic fact. These and other questions about the way in which the word good is actually used seem to me very difficult to answer. It is very generally thought that the word good is used in a great many different senses, so many and differing in such subtle ways that they can scarcely be classified. I think this is true, so that it seems to me that in considering the meaning of the word good when it is used in the same sense as the phrase intrinsically good we have to limit our attention to the word's careful use among comparatively sophisticated people. I think it is pretty clear that within these limits, and in those uses in which the word seems to have the required sense, the things which are said to be good are all complex, just as the things which professor Moore thought good were complex. If those who ascribe goodness to complex wholes are sometimes expressing facts when they do so, it follows that the answer to my first question, on the assumption that I made in asking that question, is that the word good is not used to stand for a non-relational character of the sort which has been described; for the assumption which I made was that such a character can never

belong to a complex whole. But the case is not quite so simple as this; for those who say that this or that complex whole is good may want to say that the whole in question has a certain non-relational character of the sort described, but be mistaken in thinking so. That is, it may be that goodness in one sense is a quality or is a non-relational character of the sort that has been described, but the word good in this sense is always misapplied. This would be very paradoxical, and it is natural to think that the sorts of thing which are commonly said to have a certain character are some guide to the nature of the character which they are said to have. But I think that besides two definite reasons can be given for denying that intrinsic goodness is a non-relational character of the sort that has been described which is always ascribed to complex wholes, and ascribed wrongly since such a character can never belong to any complex whole. First, I think it does not make sense to speak of using a word to stand for a quality as a non-relational character of the sort described of which there is no instance; so that if the word good is being used so as to make sense, or so as to have a meaning, either it is being used to stand for some quality or non-relational character of the sort described of which there is some



instance or it is not being used to stand for a character of that kind or those kinds at all. But it seems impossible to think that people can speak about a quality or non-relational character of the sort described without anyone being acquainted with any instances of it; and equally impossible to think that people can be acquainted with instances of a certain character and yet always ascribe it, not to those things which actually have it, but to things of a kind to which it never belongs, and to ascribe it to which makes nonsense. Secondly, although arguments from such things as the origin of names are usually worthless, I think we may say in this case that it is very hard to see how the word good can ever have been applied in such a way as to stand for a quality or non-relational character of the sort described if the only use that has been made of it in this sense is to ascribe goodness to things of a kind which cannot possess it, and if it is never used to ascribe goodness to the things which do possess it.

My second question was whether, apart from the reasons I have adduced for thinking that a non-relational character of the sort that has been described cannot belong to a complex whole, it may be that the word good is used to stand for a character which can be an element of an atomic fact. On this point I think it suffices

to say that if the word good were used to stand for such a character we should expect to be able to find some sentence containing the word good or the phrase intrinsically good which could be used to express an atomic fact, or at any rate such that it was not absurd to suggest that it could be used to express an atomic fact. And I think it is pretty clear that we can not find any such sentence. If this consideration is conclusive, it suffices to give a negative answer to my first as well as to my second question.

I have tried to show that if it is admitted that any quality or any non-relational character which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and non-composite and non-conjunctive, can occur as an element of atomic fact, and if it is admitted that, if the word good is used to stand for a character of the sort described, there must be some instance of the character for which it stands, then it follows from considerations I have put forward that the word good is not used to stand for a character of the sort described. If at least these two admissions are not made, then my second objection to professor Moore's sort of opinion is not conclusive. I have tried to show in my second objection that the word good is never used to stand for a character of the sort that

professor Moore would call a quality and which I think is generally so called. It is possible that professor Moore has used the word good in a way in which it is not ordinarily used, but this is very unlikely, and is expressly disavowed on page 6 of Principia Ethica. So I think that on the two assumptions I have mentioned it can be shown that goodness is not what professor Moore called a quality. My third objection will rest upon the latter of these assumptions, but not on the former.

My third objection to professor Moore's sort of opinion is that we do not find the sort of evidence we should expect for the occurrence in the world of a non-relational character which is simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple, and non-composite and non-conjunctive, and which is also a non-natural ethical character of complex wholes. I have said that I do not myself think that it makes sense to ascribe a character of the sort described to a complex whole; but since this would not be admitted by everyone it is worth while to consider the question without making this assumption. I assume that if a word is used to stand for a certain non-relational character of the sort described, there must be instances of this character. If this is so, and if the word good stands for such a character, and if, as would be generally said, and as professor Moore would say,

a large number of things in the world have that character, then we should expect to find fairly complete agreement on the question which the things are that have that character; just as it is generally agreed that the sky is usually either blue or grey. But there is no sort of agreement, either among philosophers or people in general, that certain things are good and that certain other things are not; on the contrary, disputes about the value of this or that kind of thing are constantly occurring. If it were possible, as I think it is not, for the word good to stand for a non-relational character of the sort described of which there are no instances, the answer might be made that everyone is always mistaken in all ascriptions of goodness, for as it happens nothing is good. Even if this answer were admissible, I scarcely think anyone would make it. As it is, since people's ascriptions of goodness conflict, we must conclude that either a large number of them are mistaken or they are using the word good, not to stand for a non-relational character of the sort described, but in some such way that their apparently conflicting statements are not incompatible. But about other non-relational characters of the sort I am considering there do not seem to be many mistakes made. The comparison is difficult because we do not ordinarily speak

about determinate non-relational characters; but only about general characters having a certain sort of connexion with them; for example about red or blue, but not about determinate shades. But there seems as a rule to be agreement that this or that thing has some determinate shade falling within a certain range; or, to take tactual characters, that this or that thing has ~~some~~ determinate degree of smoothness or roughness falling within a certain range. It is strange if there is one non-relational character, or two, if badness is to be treated in the same way, about which so little can be ascertained.

I think professor Moore might say that many of the disagreements about goodness are due to failures to recognise the variety of senses, in which the word good is used, and misunderstandings of the way in which one is using it one's self. I think this is true. But it seems to me that even when we have done all we can to remove misunderstanding and to ensure that we are only speaking about intrinsic goodness in a particular sense, we are almost as likely as ever to disagree about the things which are good. Supposing this is so, it does not, I think, follow that goodness is not a quality in professor Moore's sense; people may, for all we can tell, make frequent mistakes about the incidence of some quality. Nor can I go on to ask what the reasons are for thinking

that a thing has a quality called goodness; according to professor Moore's sort of opinion there would be no reasons. But I can ask what the reasons are for thinking that there is such a thing as the quality called goodness. Supposing a colour-blind person asks me what the reasons are for thinking that there is a character, or quality in the sense of that word appropriate to general characters, called red, since he can discover no uniform difference between the things said to be red and the things said to be green, I can answer that almost everyone agrees in thinking that the red things have a certain common character and the green things a certain different common character. But supposing I am asked what the reasons are for thinking that there is a non-relational character or quality called goodness, and what reason there is to think there is a uniform difference between the things called good and the things called bad, I do not see any comparable answer which can be given.

In this chapter I have examined the meaning of statements of professor Moore to the effect that goodness is a quality, and have come to the conclusion that he thought goodness a non-relational character which is not composed of parts nor a conjunction of several characters, and that he probably thought it simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple; and that he thought that

goodness belongs to complex wholes. I have argued that these statements I have ascribed to him can not all be true, on the three grounds that no character of the sort described can belong to a complex whole, that the word good is never used in an ordinary sense to stand for a non-relational character of the sort described, and that we do not find the sort of evidence we should expect for the existence of such a character as goodness would be if professor Moore were right. I may have been wrong in saying that professor Moore thought goodness simple in the sense in which a determinate shade is simple; he may only have thought it simple in some other sense, such as that sense, for example, in which we can call yellowness simple. If he wanted to call goodness simple only in some other sense, I think my arguments can be adapted so as not to depend upon the sense in which a determinate shade is simple; but the exact way in which they would have to be adapted would I think depend upon the sort of relation which professor Moore thought there was between goodness and things which are simple in this sense. He might think, for example, that goodness was related to something determinate in the same sort of way in which yellowness, a general character, is related to determinate shades; this is the

interpretation to which his comparison between goodness and yellowness would be most favourable; but he might **████** think that some other relation held.

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### 3 NATURALISM.

In this chapter I shall examine some aspects of one special sort of definition or explanation of the meanings of the words good and right and other expressions of the sort we may call ethical expressions,<sup>16</sup> namely that sort of definition or explanation which would very commonly be called naturalistic; I shall first review certain sorts of argument against naturalism which I think are often considered to disprove any naturalistic theory; next I shall state a special sort of naturalistic theory which I am inclined to hold, in doing which I shall express a part of my opinions about the nature of meaning; and I shall conclude by examining and adapting another naturalistic theory originated by Mr. R. B. Braithwaite. I think the words naturalism and naturalistic as I am using them have a fairly clear sense in which they are often used, but which is not very easy to define. However I shall give a definition of naturalism which is not very precise or clear, but which I think suffices to show what that familiar sense is in which I shall speak of naturalism.

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<sup>16</sup> In this chapter and elsewhere I try to use the word expression in one sense only, which I think it often bears. In this sense an expression is a word, or a phrase, or a clause, or a sentence.

I shall say that an ethical theory or argument is naturalistic if it is asserted in it that some ethical expression in one of its ethical uses does not stand for any character which can not be mentioned in describing the things that happen, or in describing the order of nature; or if in it an ethical conclusion is derived solely from premisses about things that happen or about the order of nature. I think it will be understood that the expressions I call ethical are the words good, value, right, and so on, such phrases as worth having for its own sake, and a variety of other expressions; and that there is a certain group of their uses which can be called their ethical uses, which are not exemplified, for instance, by the use of the word good in the sentence Mollison has a good prospect of flying the Atlantic; and that a conclusion is an ethical conclusion if it can be expressed by a sentence in which one of these ethical uses of an expression occurs. Criticisms of naturalism are one of the chief parts of Principia Ethica, on page 10 of which, in the third impression, professor Moore said that many philosophers had thought that when they named the properties other than goodness belonging to all things which are good ' they were actually defining good,' and thought that these properties were 'absolutely and entirely the same with goodness'; and he added that he proposed to call this opinion the 'naturalistic fallacy.'

This use of the word naturalistic seems to differ somewhat from mine, although probably most of the theories which I should call naturalistic professor Moore would also have called naturalistic; and I am not sure that this quotation fairly represents professor Moore's use of the word, as in chapter II § 26 he gave a different account of naturalism, which is possibly incompatible with that which I have quoted and compatible with my own definition, but which I find very obscure.<sup>17</sup>

Theories which are quite clearly naturalistic have been put forward by many philosophers, such as Hume, the

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<sup>17</sup> Still another definition of naturalism, or at least of the naturalistic fallacy, was given by John Wisdom in Logical Constructions I, note 1 on page 213, Mind April 1931. To put this in my own words, so far as I can, without letters as symbols; someone is committing the naturalistic fallacy if he is saying that goodness could be an element of an atomic fact or contains a part which could be an element of an atomic fact, or is saying that goodness is something which in fact has one of these characters. This is an ingenious definition; if naturalism so defined is a fallacy, and if the arguments of my second chapter about atomic facts and qualities are correct, then goodness can certainly not be a quality. I am not sure whether to define naturalism in this way comes to the same thing as saying, in my own vaguer terms, that a theory is naturalistic if it is asserted in it that goodness is a character which can be mentioned in describing the things that happen.

hedonistic utilitarians, the evolutionary ethical writers, and in modern times professor Westermarck, although few of their writings have been free from occasional remarks which seem inconsistent with naturalism. But besides the naturalism of avowed naturalists we can detect here and there naturalistic arguments in the writings of many authors who seem to have no intention of expressing a naturalistic theory. For example professor J. S. Mackenzie in his Manual of ethics, in the introduction I § 1, said that ' since Ethics is the science of Conduct as a whole, and not of any particular kinds of Conduct, it is not any of these special ends that it sets itself to consider, but the supreme or ultimate end to which our whole lives are directed. This end is commonly referred to as the Summum Bonum or Supreme Good.' Professor Mackenzie's words seem to suggest that if we could discover the supreme end, supposing there were such a thing, to which our whole lives are as a matter of fact directed, it would follow that we had discovered the supreme good or the end towards which our lives ought to be directed. If this were so, an ethical conclusion would have followed solely from premisses about things that happen, and professor Mackenzie's theory would be naturalistic in my sense, which I feel sure he did not intend. The same

sort of confusion can I think be found in many places in the first two books of Aristotle's Ethics, and many modern writings. It does not seem worth while to study instances of this confusion systematically, but I call attention to it to show that some care is needed to distinguish between a naturalistic and a non-naturalistic theory or argument.

The considerations and arguments which I shall give against and for naturalism in this chapter apply equally, I think, to all ethical expressions, although the particular form in which I give them will sometimes depend upon the examples I use. The ethical expressions I shall use for examples will generally be the words good and goodness, in that use in which they have the same sense as intrinsically good and intrinsic goodness. I shall state three possible arguments against naturalistic theories, each of which seems to have considerable weight. Next I shall try to say why I am, on the whole, inclined to believe in naturalism, and I shall express at considerable length a special naturalistic theory which seems not to be open to two, and perhaps to all three, of the objections to naturalism which I shall have given. I shall conclude by criticising another naturalistic theory, which seems to me incorrect in its original form,

but capable of being adapted in such a way as to supplement my own theory.

The first sort of argument against naturalism that I want to consider can be brought against any theory which contains a suggested analysis or definition of such expressions as intrinsically good; but it is specially hard to see what answer there can be from a naturalistic point of view. This sort of argument was used by professor Moore in Principia Ethica,<sup>18</sup> and it would be convenient to give it a name; it might perhaps be called the argument from the uniqueness of goodness. The argument consists of saying, about any character for which it is suggested that the expression intrinsically good is used to stand, that it makes sense to say that to possess that character, or a thing which possesses that character, is good; and that this is so because the word good is used to stand for something other than the character proposed. For example, if it were suggested that the sentence aesthetic enjoyments are good has the same meaning as the sentence other things being equal I should prefer aesthetic enjoyments to occur rather than not, we should reply, using the argument I am speaking of,

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<sup>18</sup> On pages 15 and 16 of the third impression.

that it makes sense to say that a preference for the occurrence rather than the non-occurrence of aesthetic enjoyments is good. It is very hard to think that to say this is simply to say that someone prefers the occurrence to the non-occurrence of a preference for aesthetic enjoyments. The definition of goodness which I have used in my illustration is not specially plausible; but about any suggested naturalistic definition a corresponding argument can be used, and it seems to me that in every case it is very hard not to think that the word good is being used in a different sense from that which it would be given by the proposed definition. The same sort of objection can of course be made, not merely to any naturalistic theory which gives a definition of goodness, but to any theory at all which gives a definition; and this objection was in fact used by professor Moore to show that goodness is indefinable. But the objection seems much less convincing against a non-naturalistic than against a naturalistic definition. Suppose it were suggested that to say that something is good is to say that other things being equal it would be right to bring it into existence if possible, we could ask whether what it is right to bring into existence is good. This question appears to make sense, but it

seems to me far from clear that to ask it is not simply to ask whether it is right to bring into existence what it is right to bring into existence; that is, it does not seem to me clear that an affirmative answer does not merely make sense by being a tautology. So I am inclined to say that the sort of argument I am considering is much stronger against naturalistic than against non-naturalistic theories. But I think the examples I have given serve to show the special way in which questions about the meaning of such words as good are puzzling. To me the argument from the uniqueness of goodness seems convincing - I do not say that it seems conclusive - against naturalistic theories, but much less convincing against those that are not naturalistic; yet it is very hard to say what sort of test can be given to decide whether in a given sentence the word good is being used in such a way as to make a tautology or in such a way as to make a synthetic statement.<sup>19</sup>

The second sort of argument I shall consider is one

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<sup>19</sup> Since what we now call a tautology seems to be the same as what used to be called an analytic proposition, we may as well call sentences that make sense and are not tautologies synthetic. A sentence expresses a synthetic statement or proposition if it and its contradictory make sense.



which can be used against any naturalistic theory giving a definition of such an expression as intrinsically good, as well as against some proposed accounts of the things which are intrinsically good.<sup>20</sup> For any naturalistic definition of goodness, we can imagine two situations one of which exemplifies the character for which according to the definition the word good stands in a much higher degree or to a much greater extent than the other, but about which those who use this argument would suggest that the situation which would be the worse of the two according to the proposed definition is evidently the better. This may be called the argument from comparison. The example to be chosen depends on the particular definition which is to be criticised. Suppose it is suggested that to say that something is good in a certain sense of the word good is to say that either it is a state of happiness or it is a whole in which there are enough states of happiness to allow us to say that the person or people involved in the whole are happy on the whole; and that other ethical uses of the word good can be defined in terms of this use. If

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<sup>20</sup> An argument of this sort with the latter aim seems to be used in the third chapter of Principia Ethica, on page 89, and to be implicit in various parts of the chapter; but it is not elaborated.

we are to advance the sort of argument I am describing, we shall imagine a state of affairs in a particular society in which most people are generally happy, but are also as a rule stupid, selfish, bad mannered, and vulgar in their tastes, and on the other hand we shall imagine a state of affairs in which most people are rarely happy, but are on the whole intelligent, generous, polite, and sensitive; and we shall suggest that if either of these states of affairs would be good the latter would be rather than the former, and that in any case the latter would certainly be better than the former, that is to say either its degree of goodness would be greater or its degree of badness less than that of the former. And it does seem as though for any proposed naturalistic definition of intrinsic goodness some case can be imagined in which a state of affairs answering to the proposed definition would not be good, or would be less good than a state of affairs not answering to the definition, even if the particular case I have suggested is not convincing. This sort of argument would show conclusively that a particular naturalistic theory was false, provided it were clear that the sense of the word good which the theory was supposed to define was the same as the sense in which it was proposed to show that something answering to the definition

given by the theory was not good; similarly the first sort of argument I described would show conclusively that a particular theory was false, provided it were clear that the sense of the word good in which it was proposed to show that it made sense, and made a synthetic statement, to say that something answering to the definition was or was not good was the same as the sense which the theory was supposed to define.

The third sort of argument against naturalism that I want to consider is much harder than the other two to put in a clear and convincing form, yet it is one which I think for some people decides the question against naturalism. I can only express this argument, or this consideration, in a very vague way. Suppose any definition or explanation of the meaning of the phrase intrinsic goodness, or some such ethical expression, is offered, which is naturalistic in the sense I have defined; then those who are convinced by the sort of consideration I want to express will say something like this; it seems to me as though, or I feel as though the world is incomplete or as though some familiar element of the world has been left out, unless something is good in some other sense than that which has been suggested. The answer can be made that things are undoubtedly good in a number of other senses, since the word good has a great variety

of uses. But this answer does not suffice to refute the objection I am considering; for provided the theory that is being objected to is naturalistic throughout, the same sort of objection will be made to the explanation it gives of any use of the word good; and those who take the line of my third argument will finally say something like this: I feel as though some things are good in some sense other than any you have suggested. As I have put it, this argument seems exceedingly weak; it seems to come to the same thing as saying that there is a non-naturalistic sense of the word good which is familiar to most people, or in which the word stands for something familiar to most people; and this is not so much an argument for anything, as the very thing that has to be proved. Yet it seems to be worth stating, because many people seem to be convinced by arguments of this sort, and I find myself not entirely unaffected by them. Unfortunately I can think of no clearer way of expressing it, though I can think of ways which would be more obscure or confused. I think one confusion that is very commonly made by people who are convinced by the sort of consideration I am describing is this; it is often supposed, I think, that a naturalistic theory says that there is no such thing as goodness, when really it says

that there is such a thing and that goodness is to be defined in a certain way; and it is often supposed that a naturalistic theory can properly be answered by saying it seems to me clear that there is such a thing as goodness, although this statement is quite consistent with the theory in question. If it is proposed to define goodness in a naturalistic way, then supposing for example someone holds a non-naturalistic theory of professor Moore's type, considering that goodness is a quality, to refute the naturalistic theory he must show, not that there is such a thing as goodness, but that there is such a thing as goodness which does not answer to the naturalistic definition. It seems to me that the only possible tests of the soundness of this third sort of argument are reflective or imaginative, such as each person has to construct for himself; we have to ask ourselves what difference it would make to the world if there were no such thing as goodness in any sense which can not be defined in a naturalistic way. If we conclude that it would make no difference, we shall be satisfied that some naturalistic theory is true. But if we conclude that it would make a difference of a certain sort, the sort of difference which we find would be made will show us how the use of the word good is to

be defined or explained in a non-naturalistic way.

I find it much easier to state arguments against naturalism than to give the reasons which lead me on the whole to favour naturalism. I am far from feeling certain that some naturalistic theory is true, I am not sure that I can give the reasons which actually lead me to think that this is probably so, and I am afraid that such reasons as I can give may seem to be merely prejudices.

I shall begin my general defence of naturalism by stating, as shortly and clearly as I can, the belief I am strongly inclined to hold, the prejudice as it may be called, which leads me, and I think leads other people, to look for a naturalistic explanation of the meaning of ethical words. I shall go on to express certain considerations which do not, I think, amount to anything like a proof of naturalism, but which seem to show that a much simpler and easier answer to ethical questions can be given in a naturalistic way than in any other. But since we have no general ground for expecting the answers to questions to be simple and easy, I am doubtful whether this is worth showing as an argument for naturalism.

The belief I have mentioned is, I think, a belief that everything in the world can be described or explained in a certain way; namely in the course of describing the

things that happen or the order of nature. I am using now the terms which I used in my definition of naturalism, and it seems as though the belief I am describing comes to the same thing as a belief that everything can be explained in a naturalistic way; so that a statement of this belief is unfortunately a poor argument for naturalism in any particular subject. But I think a belief of this sort, or a tendency to have such a belief, whether or not well founded, is very common, and is expressed in a number of different ways besides that which I have used. For example one sort of remark that is very commonly made is that everything in the world can be explained in a scientific way, and another is that there is nothing which is not a part of nature. Remarks like these seem to express beliefs resembling that which I have said that I am inclined to have. I am not sure what reasons can be given in favour of beliefs like these. One way in which they are commonly defended is by giving in terms of them causal accounts of how contrary beliefs may have come into existence. It does not seem as though as a rule a belief is proved false if it is shown that it was caused in this or that way.<sup>21</sup> But I am not sure that

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21 Although the causes of a belief and its truth are, I think, rarely unconnected. If a true belief is not held as a result of a mistake, it is well founded; and some of the happenings which are causes of its being held will as a rule also be reasons for holding it.

any better reasons can be given in favour of general beliefs of the naturalistic sort.

In putting forward the following considerations, as showing that a simple and easy naturalistic answer can be given to ethical questions, I think I shall very likely be touching problems which can not be properly solved by philosophical methods, but only by experimental psychologists. None the less it may be worth while to express a problem that seems to require solution, even if it cannot yet be solved. The proper solution of the sort of problems which arise from what I have to say seems to me to depend upon the solving of various questions about what is meant by the word meaning in some of its uses and also perhaps upon the solving of certain problems, which I take to be psychological rather than philosophical, about the way in which people learn or understand a language. It will not be disputed that every normal human being, as he grows up, becomes aware of more and more features or elements of the world, and at the same time becomes acquainted with more and more parts or aspects of one or more languages. The process of becoming acquainted with a language consists of hearing or seeing words and combinations of words, learning in a certain sense how the words and their combinations are



correlated with elements of the world which users of the words want to bring to the notice of their hearers or readers, and learning to use and combine the words, making use of the accepted correlations, so as to bring some element of the world to the notice of a hearer or reader.<sup>22</sup> This account of the process of becoming acquainted with a language is both obscure and vague; the way in which I have used the word learn is obscure, and the way in which I have used expressions about bringing elements of the world to someone's notice is vague. The obscurity I think I can lessen a little, but I do not know how to say exactly what it is that anyone is doing who uses a combination of words in a particular sense; if I could do this I think I should have solved one of the chief questions about meaning. To learn how combinations of words are correlated with elements of the world which their user wants to bring to someone's notice, in the sense in which I have spoken of learning this, is

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22 This expression about bringing an element of the world to someone's notice is intentionally as vague as possible. It disregards the difference between the way in which a sentence works and the way in which a word works. I wish I knew how to analyse this difference, but as I do not, I have avoided the difficulty at this point. A very conjectural analysis of some aspects of the meaning of words and sentences is given later in this chapter.

to form a habit of responding or reacting, or a disposition to respond to the use of these combinations in the way which I can only call, for want of more precise knowledge, appropriate to the elements of the world with which the combinations are correlated.<sup>23</sup> And to use and combine words, according to the accepted correlations, so as to bring some element of the world to someone's notice, is to form a habit of using, or a disposition to use, to bring elements of the world to someone's notice, those combinations to which the habit has been formed of making a response appropriate to the required elements. This account of learning a language could perhaps be expressed in terms of behaviour psychology. There is one point about which I was forced to be inaccurate in what I have said so far, in order to avoid excessive complication. I spoke of making a response appropriate to the elements of the world with which a combination of words is correlated; but as a matter of fact it is not quite accurate to speak of elements of the world being correlated with combinations of words, or at any rate not accurate to speak as though they have accepted correlations. The correlations which actually

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<sup>23</sup> 'The silent adjustments to understand colloquial language are enormously complicated,' L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* 4.002.

occur link elements of the world, not with combinations of words, but with particular words and schemes or constructions by means of which they can be combined; we might call these schemes rules of combination, but they are rules that are usually observed unconsciously. I wish it were possible to avoid mentioning schemes or rules, as they are of a different logical type from words, whereas combinations of words are either of the same or of a closely connected logical type. But we may perhaps say that the rules or schemes of combination are logical constructions from the combinations which have actually been used. The rules or schemes prevailing in modern European languages are very complex; the significance of a particular construction depends not only upon the sorts of words, the parts of speech for example, which make up the combination called a sentence, but upon the particular words. Compare the king is dead and the day is cloudy.

I have explained at some length the sort of account I should give of the process of becoming acquainted with a language. It seems to me that most people go through the process sufficiently far to be able to use their native languages quite adequately for ordinary purposes, but are much less able to see what the correlations are, with which they are as a matter of fact conforming, between elements of the world and words. The erratic

way in which the elements of the world are correlated with words and their schemes of combination seems to be one of the chief sources of philosophical problems. As a result of these erratic correlations people sometimes, when they are making abstract or complicated statements, use combinations of words which are not part of any accepted scheme. There seem to be several ways in which this can happen. A clear account of what meaning is would say exactly how these ways differ; I think it suffices for me to point out that there are different ways. Sometimes people use combinations of words which are not part of an accepted scheme in such a way as to produce what would usually be called contradictions, and sometimes in such a way as to produce what would usually be called nonsense. It seems that sometimes people also use novel combinations which are neither contradictory nor nonsensical, and are making innovations as a result of which a new scheme of combination is added to the language they are using.

So far I have only spoken of combinations of words as instruments which either are significant, that is to say communicate beliefs or statements, or are intended to be significant, but are not so because they do not follow an accepted scheme of combination. But it is pretty clear that people use combinations of words not only for the sake

of making statements, but from various other motives. The motives for using words on any occasion are probably as a rule, and chiefly, desires to produce certain effects in some person or people who hear or read the words.

Probably the effect which is most commonly desired is that the hearer or reader shall become aware of the statement which is being made, or in other words shall understand the sentence which is being used, or make the response appropriate to certain elements of the world; perhaps I should say the joint effect consisting of understanding and belief. That is, the desire to communicate is probably the commonest, though not the sole motive. But other effects are also often sought, and among those which are perhaps, after understanding, most commonly sought are that the hearer or reader shall act or feel in a particular way.<sup>24</sup>

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24 The distinction between the wish to make a statement and other motives resembles the distinction drawn by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in the meaning of meaning between the referential and the emotive use of words. The distinction is first introduced on page 10, in the third edition, and use is made of it in many places. But Messrs. Ogden and Richards often write as though words spoken on a particular occasion exemplified one use or the other, but not both. It seems to me that most sentences are used from several kinds of motive. The general account of meaning which I suggest in this chapter differs a good deal, I think, from that given by Messrs. Ogden and Richards.

It is obvious that both these objects are sought by a man who makes a political speech or delivers a warning. It is also pretty clear that some words and expressions are particularly likely to lead to actions or feelings on the part of the hearer or reader; for example, patriot, noble, selfish, inhuman, coward, loyalty, white man, honour, and countless others. It seems to me that most ethical words are in this class; right, good, ought, duty, and so on, though not optimific or deontological. I am not called upon to say what the causes are of this or that word being a specially effective stimulus to action or feeling; all I require is agreement that there are words which are specially effective in this way.

It is fairly familiar that the same statement can often be made in several different ways, that is, several sentences can be found with the same meaning, and that sometimes one sentence is much more likely than another which has the same meaning to lead to actions or feelings on the part of the hearer or reader. If a man has to choose between sentences some of which are more likely than others to stimulate actions or feelings, and chooses one of those that are more likely, the cause of his choosing this rather than some other sentence is probably that he desires the occurrence of some kind of action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader. It seems to

me that most people are not as a rule aware that they are choosing the words they use from other motives than the desire to make a particular statement, and that if there are any expressions or uses of expressions which commonly occur in sentences without having an accepted correlation with elements of the world, most people are not as a rule aware of the difference between the use of these expressions and of others. But that there are expressions or uses of expressions which commonly occur in sentences without having an accepted correlation with elements of the world is not at all a general belief. None the less I think it not improbable that there are such expressions or uses, and if there are, a very easy naturalistic explanation of the use of ethical expressions is possible.

This explanation would be something like what follows. An expression or use of an expression has an accepted meaning if those who use it have the habit of responding, when they hear or read it, in a way appropriate to some element of the world, or a habit of so responding to its occurrence in some accepted scheme of combination. The distinction between expressions which have and expressions which lack accepted meanings is not entirely definite; some meanings are more fixed than others, and the more fixed are those for which there are fewer failures to make the appropriate response. As a rule a speaker or writer chooses a word, if it is a word for which he might find alternatives,

either as a result of its meaning being more fixed than that of the alternatives, or as a result of the assumed greater probability of its leading to a desired action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader. Sometimes an expression has no accepted meaning at all, but is specially likely to give some sort of stimulus to action or feeling; and the motives which lead people to choose such expressions are usually desires for the occurrence of an action or feeling on someone's part. Most people are not aware that some expressions have no accepted meanings, and suppose that they are doing the same sort of thing in using such expressions as in using expressions with accepted meanings from a desire to produce understanding. It is the easier for them to make this mistake, because as a rule a sentence in which an expression with no accepted meaning occurs has some meaning, to which the expression in question does not contribute. The word good, about which there is so much discussion, is in certain of its uses a word with no accepted meaning, but it is a word which is constantly used because it is specially likely to lead to actions or feelings on the part of the hearer or reader. Consequently such a sentence as to lower the rate of income tax would be a good thing, if it exemplifies one of the uses of the word good which have no accepted meaning, has no meaning as a whole, because not all the words in it are capable of contributing to its meaning; but it has some meaning, namely that income tax is in force.



But the sentence evidently has not the same meaning as the sentence income tax is in force, for in that case, that income tax is in force would be the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Since sentences containing expressions with no accepted meaning have as a rule a meaning in this limited way, it has been harder than it would have been otherwise for people to see that there are some words and other expressions which are in a certain sense meaningless.

If it is admitted that there are expressions which, in the sense I have tried to explain, have no accepted meanings, then I think that the account I have just given of the use of ethical words may well be true. Most ethical expressions clearly fall within the class I have already spoken of which consists of expressions that are specially likely to lead to some action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader. The expressions in this class seem to have another common character, namely that their meanings are much harder than those of others to define or explain. There is no definite line between the expressions that are specially effective and others; they differ in degree of effectiveness. Similarly the difference in difficulty or ease of definition or explanation is one of degree, and the degree of this difficulty seems

to correspond approximately to the degree of an expression's effectiveness. It is natural to conjecture that some or all of these expressions are harder to explain and more effective stimuli to action or feeling the more they depart from having an accepted meaning. So if it is admitted that there are expressions with no accepted meanings, a fairly convincing argument can be used to show that most or all ethical expressions are of this sort, so that ethical naturalism is probably or certainly true. Whether such an argument really can give a proof of naturalism I do not feel sure, and I can see various difficulties which would still have to be solved.

There are two sorts of difficulty, arising from the sort of naturalistic argument I have stated, which impress me most strongly. One of these difficulties is that we can apparently distinguish between different senses or uses of expressions which, according to my argument, have no accepted meanings, and can to some extent define them or explain their use or meaning; the other is that there are certain ethical expressions which do not seem to be nearly so likely as the majority consisting of the more familiar expressions to lead to some action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader; these less effective expressions are mostly expressions which have

been invented by philosophers for technical purposes.

I propose to consider these difficulties in the order in which I have stated them.

We often speak, and I have spoken in this essay, about different senses or uses of this or that ethical expression; for example, I have had occasion to write about that use of the word good in which it has the same sense in which the phrase intrinsically good is used; I have also distinguished above between uses of the word good which have no accepted meaning and uses which have. I do not think the latter distinction involves a special problem; we are faced with a problem when we try to see what is meant by saying that a certain word is used in one sense on one occasion and in another sense on another, and when we try to see exactly what is meant by saying that a word in a certain use has no accepted meaning, or that a certain meaningless use is the same as or different from a certain other, but I do not think there is a third problem about the difference between significant and meaningless uses.

When we distinguish between different uses or senses of ordinary words with accepted meanings, what sort of distinction we are making is up to a point fairly clear. We are saying that in some sentences in which a certain word occurs the adjoining words, or the context of the

sentence, or the voice of the speaker, or something of that sort, indicate that the word is being used with a different accepted meaning from that which similar indications show that it has in some other sentences. So it is pretty clear that if there are expressions or uses of expressions without accepted meanings, either we must be mistaken in supposing there are ever different meaningless uses or senses of one expression, or the meaningless uses or senses of an expression must differ from one another in quite a different sense from that in which the ordinary uses or senses of expressions differ.

I stated as a second part of my first difficulty that we can to some extent define meaningless uses of expressions or explain such uses or their meanings; this point is, I think, closely connected with that which I have just stated. If I may assume that there is a clear distinction between ethical and non-ethical expressions, I may say that ethical expressions can be defined either by means of each other, or by means of non-ethical expressions; a definition will be by means of ethical expressions, or in ethical terms, if it contains at least one ethical expression; otherwise it will be by means of non-ethical expressions, or in non-ethical terms. Both kinds of definition have been given by philosophers. Any theory which includes definitions

of all ethical expressions in non-ethical terms will of course be naturalistic. It seems to me that all non-ethical definitions of ethical expressions have always aroused controversy, have not been at all widely accepted, and have been far from plausible, even if they have not actually been the result of mistakes; whereas some definitions of ethical expressions in ethical terms would be questioned by scarcely anyone, and about many others it seems very hard to be sure that they are wrong, even if they have not been generally accepted. For example, probably almost everyone would admit that to speak of someone's duty, in certain senses or uses of the word duty, has the same meaning as to speak of what he ought to do, and in certain senses or uses, the same perhaps, has the same meaning as to speak of what it is right for him to do. Professor Moore argued in Principia Ethica that rightness can be defined in terms of goodness.<sup>25</sup> That this is so is not generally admitted, it is denied for example, by Mr. W.D. Ross in the Right and the Good.<sup>26</sup> But it is very hard to see for certain that professor Moore's opinion is false, and it cannot be disproved by the sort of tests which, I have suggested, seem to disprove

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<sup>25</sup> On pages 146-7 of the third impression.

<sup>26</sup> On pages 8-11 and elsewhere.

naturalistic definitions of ethical expressions. So it seems as though in some sort of way ethical expressions make a closed system, and stand in quite a different relation to each other from that in which they stand to other expressions; as though their uses or meanings are interconnected in a way in which they are not connected with the uses or meanings of other expressions. If we think, as I have just been supposing, that most or all ethical expressions have no accepted meanings, although most people make the mistake of thinking they have the same sort of meanings as ordinary expressions, we shall not be surprised to find the uses or apparent meanings of ethical expressions isolated in this way. We shall naturally expect that if ethical expressions seem to be capable of definition, they will seem to be definable by means of each other rather than by means of expressions with accepted meanings. That the uses or meanings of ethical expressions seem to be closed or isolated in this way is entirely compatible with the sort of naturalism I am suggesting, but it is also compatible with most or all non-naturalistic theories. For according to those theories ethical expressions will have accepted meanings, and meanings of a special sort which could only be defined in ethical terms.

It seems, then, as though we can distinguish between different uses or senses of expressions which have no

accepted meaning, and can say that in a certain meaningless use such an expression is used in the same sense as a certain other; and can thus define such expressions in terms of each other, though not in terms of significant expressions. If we accept the conclusion, which is I think surprising, but which is part of my account of having an accepted meaning, that expressions differ in the degree in which they have an accepted meaning, then I think we can explain on the same lines the apparent differences of use or sense among meaningless expressions, or the possession of different meaningless uses, and the apparent identity of sense between different meaningless expressions or uses. Suppose any expression, significant or not, leads on some occasion to some action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader, or in fact any response on his part other than understanding of a statement, I shall call for the sake of convenience this result which is produced the efficacy which the expression has on that occasion. Then if the meaningless use of an expression has on nearly all occasions efficacies closely resembling one another, the expression has only one meaningless use. But if the meaningless use of an expression has very diverse efficacies on different occasions, the expression has as many meaningless uses as there are sets of efficacies

whose members closely resemble one another. A meaningless use of one expression has the same sense as a meaningless use of another expression if most members of the set of efficacies which constitute one use closely resemble most members of the set constituting the other use. Supposing these definitions are approximately right, and supposing ethical uses of expressions really are meaningless uses, then a fairly adequate naturalistic account of them has been given, even if it is harder to see in exactly what sense meaningless uses can be defined by means of each other. We may perhaps say that one of these uses gives the definition of another if they have the same sense, in the sense that has been defined, and if the defining expression has more parts than the defined expression has each of which has a meaningless use of its own, that is each of which has a set of efficacies closely resembling one another.

There remains one subsidiary obscurity which I should like to clear up before considering my second difficulty; in what sense can one speak, as I have above, of these definitions about meaningless uses as right or correct? As a rule, I think that to say a definition is right is to say that the expression or use of an expression which is supposed to be defined actually is commonly used in the sense in which the



definition states that it is used. But my definitions appear to define not only uses of my own phrase meaningless use, but also some quite familiar expressions; for example I profess to say in what sense a meaningless use of one expression has the same sense as a meaningless use of another. It seems to me very unlikely that people commonly speak of expressions having the same sense in the sense given by my definition. I think they make the mistake of supposing that meaningless uses are significant uses, they perceive the relations on account of which I should say that meaningless uses have the same sense in the special sense appropriate to them, and they mistake these relations for those on account of which we say that significant uses have the same sense, in the ordinary sense. So I think people would as a rule mistakenly ascribe identity of sense in the ordinary sense to meaningless uses. Then my definitions are not correct in the ordinary sense, for they are not correct interpretations of ordinary usage. They are correct in this special sense, which I think we have to aim at, in subjects about which mistakes are widespread, that it is ~~unwise~~ <sup>contradictory</sup> to ascribe identity of sense in the ordinary sense to meaningless uses, that none the less there is a certain relation which holds between all or a great majority of the pairs of meaningless uses to which

identity of sense would commonly be ascribed, and that there is a certain formal analogy between the sets of things in which this relation is found and the sets of things in which identity of sense in the ordinary sense is found. A similar explanation would be given about all my definitions.

The second of the difficulties, arising from the sort of naturalistic argument I have suggested, which I proposed to consider, was that that there are certain ethical expressions which do not seem to be nearly so likely as the majority to lead to some action or feeling on the part of the hearer or reader. A very good example of this class of ethical expressions is given by the word optimific, which was used, I do not know whether for the first time, by Mr. W. D. Ross in The Right and the Good. On page 34 he defined the word by implication as having the same sense as the expression productive of the best possible consequences. The word optimific is evidently not a familiar word, but must have been invented by some philosopher to have the sense I have just given, or something like it; whereas the defining phrase contains the familiar ethical word best, and will therefore, according to the sort of theory I am proposing, be a phrase with a meaningless use. But it seems as though there is not very much likelihood of the use of the

word optimific leading to actions or feelings on the part of the hearer or reader, or at any rate not much likelihood of its having sets of efficacies whose members closely resemble one another. So it seems as though it must be false to say that the word optimific has the same sense as the defining phrase, in the special sense appropriate to meaningless uses, and as though some special explanation of the way in which such a word is used is needed.

I think all ethical expressions belong to one or the other of the two classes exemplified by this word and the expression used to define it; that is, I think all are either familiar ethical expressions about which my theory that their ethical uses are meaningless is comparatively plausible, or expressions which have been invented by philosophers for technical purposes, and used chiefly by them, and defined by them by means of familiar ethical expressions. For all I know, there may be expressions which have begun as members of the second class and pressed into familiar use; but these will now simply either be members of the first class, or have acquired a non-ethical sense, so that they will not concern me **now**. So having accounted for familiar ethical expressions, to complete my theory I only have to account for those of which the word optimific is a

representative, which we may call technical ethical expressions. I think there are two ways at least in which I could take account of the technical expressions, and I shall state first that which seems to me less probable. If my theory is admitted to be true as far as it is about familiar expressions, I think it is not worth while to consider the possibility that none the less a non-naturalistic account of the technical expressions is true.

The first possible account of these expressions, and that which on the whole I should reject, is that unlike the other expressions they are significant, and have meanings which can be defined not only by means of the expressions which would usually be said to define them, but also in terms of or in reference to those expressions. It may be, for instance, that the word optimific is used in the same sense, in the ordinary sense appropriate to significant uses, in which one would use the expression having the character for which the phrase productive of the best possible consequences would be used to stand. This is a perfectly intelligible account of the word's use, and the defining phrase is certainly significant, although according to my theory there is no character for which the phrase productive of the best possible consequences would be used to stand, and so nothing ever

would be optimific; it is not only possible but probable that philosophers have thought there was such a character. But for technical ethical expressions to have meanings of the sort I have described would be incompatible with the sort of definition of them that would always be given. For an expression is never defined as having the same sense as an expression like having the character a certain phrase would be used to stand for, but simply as having the same sense as whatever phrase could have been used in a larger expression of this sort. If a definition were of the sort I have suggested, then whenever a defined expression was used something would be said by the sentence containing it about part of the defining expression, for example about the phrase productive of the best possible consequences. But obviously sentences containing defined expressions never, or hardly ever, are about part of the defining expression, but only about whatever the defining expression is used to stand for.

I am inclined to think the second of the possible accounts of these technical expressions which I can discover is approximately right. It seems to me that, although one might naturally think otherwise, technical ethical expressions are expressions with meaningless uses, and have sets of efficacies whose members closely resemble

one another, and closely resemble most members of a set of efficacies which constitutes some use of the defining expressions; that is, in the appropriate sense these expressions have the same sense as some use of their defining expression. But these technical ethical expressions are only used within small circles of people, and rarely among them. If one of them were used among people who had not heard the definition, or not accustomed to the use of definitions, its efficacy, if any, would probably not much resemble those which it ordinarily had among people familiar with it; this of course would not give the expression a meaning. On the other hand if the expression passed into ordinary use, and its definition were fairly widely known, it would simply become a familiar ethical expression. I am inclined to think that, within these small circles of people in which they are used, technical ethical expressions have meaningless uses entirely comparable to the meaningless uses of familiar expressions.

The sort of naturalistic theory I have suggested, based on a particular view of the meaning of expressions, has a considerable advantage over most naturalistic theories. No arguments against naturalism of the first and second sort that I suggested seem to have any tendency

to disprove it. Some argument of the third sort might perhaps be used against the theory, but as I have said it is doubtful whether the third sort of argument amounts to more than a particular way of expressing disbelief in naturalism. The theory has the further advantage, as I have said above, that it is possible to say in terms of it how contrary opinions may have arisen. I shall only give a very short account of the way in which according to this theory contrary opinions may have arisen, both because to say what the causes are of someone holding a belief contrary to one's own is not a way of disproving what he believes, and because questions about the causes of errors are not philosophical questions, but more probably psychological, except perhaps for those who hold beliefs which make error seem improbable or impossible.

I think one would explain the origin of contrary opinions in terms of my theory in this sort of way. What meaning is, in any of the senses with which philosophers are concerned, is not at all generally understood. Thus no one, or scarcely anyone, has seen that there are some expressions which have no meaning in the sense in which we most commonly say that expressions have, and in which most, but not all, expressions undeniably have meanings. It has been supposed that all expressions in

ordinary language have meanings in exactly the same sense, and a sense in which as it happens ethical expressions have none. Since it has been possible to elucidate the meaning of expressions of a variety of other kinds by analysis and definition, it has been supposed that all expressions, including ethical expressions, can be treated in the same way. So almost all previous ethical theories have been formed, based on the false belief that certain uses of expressions had meanings in a particular sense in which they had none. But the fact that these uses of expressions are, as it happens, meaningless has shown itself in the impossibility of arriving at any certainty that the proper analysis or explanation of the meaning of one of these expressions has been found, except when it has seemed possible to define them in terms of each other, as a result of similarities between their efficacies, and in the impossibility of finding any test to decide whether a proposed definition or explanation is correct.

I believe that when a theory such as that which I have suggested is true, one is not as a rule convinced of its truth by arguments from which it seems as though it can be deduced, but rather by reflexion on the theory itself, as a result of which one sees more and more clearly



that the problems which previously existed have ceased to be problems.<sup>27</sup> It does not seem to me clear that as a result of my naturalistic theory of ethics the problems it is concerned with are solved; but I doubt whether this would in any case seem clear, even if the theory were true so far as it goes, as long as what meaning is, in various senses of the word meaning, remains undecided. Such remarks as I have made on that subject leave it, I fear, not much less obscure than it was before; though if what I have said about various aspects of learning and understanding a language is true, it improves our insight into the question slightly by showing which of the elements involved need our attention if we are to make a thorough analysis. I should not be surprised if some theory like that which I have suggested were true; I can see no strong objection to it, as I can to every other theory on the same subject that I am familiar with. But I am by no means fully convinced of the truth of my sort of theory.

I propose now to say something about an ethical theory suggested by Mr. R. B. Braithwaite in a paper called Verbal ambiguity and philosophical analysis,

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27 F.P. Ramsey seems to have thought something of this sort. See pages 263-9 of the foundations of mathematics.

published in Proc. Arist. Soc. 1927-8.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Braithwaite's theory was not entirely unlike my own; on page 137 of his paper he said 'a great number of the sentences in which the word "good" occurs are merely noises made either to "purge" an emotion in the speaker or to produce directly a definite action or emotion in the hearer.' Evidently in part of this sentence he was saying something about some ethical expressions not unlike what I have suggested about all.<sup>29</sup> But the part of his theory I want to consider is his opinion about those ethical expressions which he thought were not mere noises, but had meanings. What he said about these other expressions was directed against professor Moore's opinion that intrinsic goodness is a quality. His theory was to the effect that the word good is commonly used in a great many more senses than are commonly distinguished. Many people have seen that the word good is used in a great variety of senses, for example that it can have the same sense as intrinsically good, or morally good, or good as a means. But Mr. Braithwaite thought that the variety was much wider than

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<sup>28</sup> I have examined this theory much more fully in an essay entitled Ethical words and Ethical facts, ~~published in~~ Mind ~~in~~ October 1933. I am more inclined to favour Mr. Braithwaite's theory than I was when I wrote that essay.

<sup>29</sup> I only noticed this point of resemblance after forming my own conjecture about meaningless uses.

has been detected, and that even when the word good would be said to have the same sense as intrinsically good it can have a great many different senses. On page 144 of his paper he said 'it seems to me that when I express in words a genuine ethical judgment . . . . I am using the word "good" . . . . to stand for a definite constituent of the proposition, but that I am by no means certain that, when I express in words a second ethical judgment, I am referring to the same constituent of the proposition.' And further down on the same page he said 'it seems to me possible that when I judge that the mental states of a person appreciating Hamlet are good, I am judging simply that I approve of these states; but that, when I make the judgment that the effects of a decrease in the duty on whisky would be good, I am judging that these effects contain a greater amount of happiness than would be contained in the effects of leaving the duty unchanged.'

Mr. Braithwaite's theory and his statement of it are rather complicated, and I could probably not do full justice to it except by quoting at great length. But it seems to me pretty clear from his paper, and in particular from the statements I have quoted, that his theory was about the meanings of ethical expressions, and in particular of the word good; and that he confined his

attention on the whole to those uses of the word good in which it would be said to have the same sense as the phrase intrinsically good. I shall venture to put in my own words that part of his theory<sup>which</sup>/I want to discuss, so far as I have understood it not only from my quotations but from his whole paper. Philosophers have been right in saying that the word good is used in a variety of senses, and I suppose Mr. Braithwaite would say the same of other ethical words; but they have not perceived the extent of this variety. Although all those occasions of the word's use when it would commonly be said to be used in the same sense may have something in common which is not shared by other occasions of its use, yet even within these groups of occasions the word is actually used in many different senses, more perhaps than could easily be classified. This variety of senses is the cause of the plausibility of arguments against naturalism of the first sort which I described in this chapter, which I called arguments from the uniqueness of goodness. Such arguments appear to show that the word good, for example, is used to stand for some other character than that for which it would stand according to some suggested definition. They seem to show this because whenever some definition is suggested one unconsciously compares it with some sense

in which the word good can be used other than <sup>that</sup> which the definition would give, and thus concludes that the definition is not a correct definition of the sense of the word that is being considered, although it may as a matter of fact correctly give a sense in which the word is sometimes used within that group of occasions within which its use in the sense one has unconsciously considered in comparison falls.

Something like this was I think part of what Mr. Braithwaite wanted to say. I am fairly sure that the exact theory which he put forward is not true, though I think it contains very useful suggestions. As a result of the complex form in which he put his theory it could be discussed and criticised from many different points of view. I propose only to criticise it here on two grounds; first by showing that Mr. Braithwaite's general conclusion is very unlikely, and secondly by showing that one of the reasons by which it was supported was the result of a mistake. His general conclusion is that the word good, and I suppose other words, are used in a large number of different senses, so that the word good, for example, is sometimes used to stand for something about approval, sometimes for something about happiness, and sometimes in other senses. A number of reasons could be given for

denying this. I think it suffices for me to say at this point that if the word good is used in the way Mr. Braithwaite suggests, then sentences containing it are sometimes sentences about approval, sometimes about happiness, and so on, <sup>at least</sup> or <sup>with a view to saying</sup> are sometimes used ~~as such~~.  
*something about one of these things.*

But those who use these sentences are presumably not aware that they are using them as sentences about approval, or whatever it may be, and that they are using them in senses in which they could equally well use other sentences, containing for instance, not such a word as good, but such a word as approve, which would not have the misleading character that good apparently has. It seems to me very unlikely that the word good and other ethical expressions are really used in this complicated way, and in a way involving these complicated states of ignorance in the users.

The more detailed considerations about Mr. Braithwaite's theory which I want to express can more appropriately be given in the second part of my criticism. His theory was, as I have said, about the meanings of certain expressions, that is, I think, about what would ordinarily be called the meanings of these expressions. In examining the meaning of any expression there are at least two quite separate groups of situations or facts which we may consider; namely the intentions

of the people who use the expression in question, which we consider when we ask the question what an expression is used to stand for or to signify, and effects which the use of an expression has upon those who hear or read it, which we consider when we ask the question in what sense an expression is understood, or what meaning is attached to it by its hearers or readers. Whether one or the other or both of these kinds of consideration is relevant depends upon the sense of the words mean and meaning with which we are concerned. For example, if we want to discover what someone meant by a certain expression on a certain occasion, we are trying to answer a question of the first kind, although to attend to considerations of the second kind as well may help us to answer it. It seems to me that the sort of question which Mr. Braithwaite would have to answer if he were asking what the meaning of the word good is, for instance, is a question about the effects which the use of the word has upon those who hear or read it. For I think that to ask what the meaning of a certain expression is, in the sense in which these words would ordinarily be used, is to ask what sense would most commonly be attached to it, or something of this sort. I do not know how to analyse or define at all clearly

expressions about people attaching a sense to this or that expression, but I think it is worth while at this point to say as much about these expressions as does seem to me fairly clear. I can then consider whether my own view of meaning conflicts at all with the arguments Mr. Braithwaite used.

It seems to me pretty certain that expressions about the ordinary meaning of expressions are to be defined in terms of the sense which has generally been attached to the expressions whose meaning is in question by those who have heard or read it, or in terms of the sense which in certain circumstances would be attached, according to the sort of expression; and that expressions about the sense which is attached to some expression by its hearers or readers are to be defined in terms of some effects or happenings in or affecting those who have heard or read the expression. The most obvious alternative to defining the ordinary meaning of an expression in terms of the sense attached to it, or which would be attached to it by hearers or readers, is to define it in terms of the sense attached to it, or which would be attached to it by people using it, that is in terms of what it is used to stand for. I think the two sorts of definition would very likely come to the same thing,



because the sense which the users of an expression attach to it when they use it is probably as a rule the same as they would attach to it if they heard or read it. None the less I think that a correct definition would be in terms of the sense attached by hearers and readers, not by users, although I am not sure what is the best way of showing that this is so. But suppose it could be shewn that a certain sense had always or nearly always been attached to a certain expression by those who had used it, then I think this fact by itself would suffice to show us what was the ordinary meaning of the expression. If on the other hand it could be shown that a certain expression had always or nearly always been used in a certain sense, but had had various different senses attached to it by those who had heard or read it, I think we should say that it was a coincidence that the users of the expression had attached the same sense to it, and that its ordinary meaning, if it had one, could only be found by considering the senses attached to the expression by those who had heard or read it. So I am fairly sure that the ordinary meaning of an expression is to be defined in terms of the sense attached to it by hearers or readers. I still have to say, so far as I can, how I think the sense attached to an expression by its hearers or

readers is to be defined in terms of effects or happenings. On this point I can only be very vague. I think a different sort of definition has to be given for different sorts of expression, that is that different sorts have ordinary meanings in different senses. I think one sort of definition has to be given for words and stereotyped phrases, another sort for other phrases, and another sort for clauses and sentences. But if the definitions required for words and for sentences could be found I think the chief part of the problem would be solved.

I spoke above, in my account of the process of learning a language, using what I fear were very obscure expressions, about forming a habit of responding to combinations of words in a way appropriate to certain elements of the world, with which the combinations of words may be said to be correlated. It seems to me that to attach a sense to a certain expression is to respond or react to the sound or sight of the expression in a way in some sense appropriate to some element of the world or to something about the world. But to make this description of the process clearer and more explicit is exceedingly hard. Any attempt to clear up the question seems to me impossible without certain assumptions. Of these there are two which seem to me the chief, and of whose truth I feel quite sure; there may be other unavoidable assumptions that I am not

aware of. These two assumptions are, first, that every sentence, whether or not it expresses a fact, if it makes sense, is in some sense about some element of the world; and second, that to react to the hearing or seeing of a sentence in a way appropriate to some element of the world or something about it is not to react in a way appropriate in the same sense to some fact which the sentence expresses. The first of these assumptions I think is pretty obviously true, though I do not know how to prove it; the second might perhaps be questioned, but I think a conclusive reason for it can be given; that the process of attaching a sense to a sentence is evidently of the same sort whether what the sentence says is false or true, and if what a sentence says is false there is no fact which it expresses - if there were one sort of attaching a sense or of understanding for false statements and another for true, it would always be possible from sufficient knowledge of the state of mind of someone understanding a sentence to tell whether what he was understanding was true or false, and this is obviously not always possible.

The process of attaching a sense to a word is obviously very often a part or aspect of the process of attaching a sense to a sentence; but not always. If I completely understand a sentence I have heard, I have

therefore attached a sense to every word in it, or every word of a certain sort. But I may attach a sense to an isolated word, as, for example, if I hear a sentence in a foreign language and have to say that I only understood one word of it. I think we have to say that if I attach a sense to a word I sometimes, at any rate, make a response appropriate to some element of the world, whereas if I attach a sense to a sentence I make a response appropriate not merely to some element of the world, though I think this is always included, but to some sort of arrangement or linking of elements of the world. If what the sentence says is true, this arrangement and the fact which the sentence expresses are themselves elements of the world, though elements on different levels from each other and from the elements of the fact.<sup>30</sup> To say clearly how anyone responds appropriately to an arrangement or linking of elements of the world seems to me even harder than saying how a response is appropriate to some element. We can not say that he responds as

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30 Differences of level were spoken of by John Wisdom in logical constructions I and II, Mind April and October 1931, in what I think was the same sense that I am using. I am inclined to think that to be on a different level comes to the same thing, or almost to the same thing, as being of a different logical type.

though the elements were linked in the way in question, that is, in a way which would be useful to him if they were so linked; this, or something like it, is what he does if he believes the statement that he understands, but not otherwise.<sup>31</sup> It is just possible, however, that the fact that a sentence expresses something which can be believed, whereas a word as a rule does not, will form part of the analysis of attaching a sense to a sentence.

We may, I think, get some idea of how the analysis is to be carried further by reflecting on one part of the processes which sometimes occur when people attach a sense to an expression. In many people part of what happens when they attach a sense to a word or a sentence consists of a visual mental image. The connexion between the nature of this image and what would ordinarily be called the meaning of the expression that is being understood may be very obvious or very obscure. I propose to consider a case in which the connexion is obvious. Supposing I hear the word Principia, I may take it that the word is used as an abbreviation for Principia Ethica, and I am then attaching a sense to the

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31 I have derived this sort of view of belief from remarks by F. P. Ramsey in facts and propositions, on page 144 of the foundations of mathematics, and from the nature of believing by R. B. Braithwaite, Proc. Arist. Soc. 1932-3.

word; I may at the same time have a mental image of my copy of the book in its place in my shelves. Supposing, again, I hear the sentence your copy of Principia Ethica is on the top shelf, I may attach a sense to this sentence, and at the same time have a mental image of the same sort as in the first case. In either case there is one part of my response to what I have heard which is appropriate both to a certain element of the world and to a certain arrangement or linking of elements of the world in a sense which is up to a point fairly clear. But the mere having of the image I have described cannot by itself constitute the appropriate response to either sort of expression, because there would be no intrinsic distinction between the images occurring when words were understood and those occurring when sentences were understood; although what is understood is in the latter case in some sense something which can be believed, in the former case not. And I am not sure that the sense in which my mental image is appropriate to elements of the world helps us to find the required sense of the word appropriate, though I think it may. It seems as though we may say that the supposed images are representations of some element of the world or some arrangements of elements. Then possibly we can explain

what appropriateness is by saying that someone attaching a sense to an expression makes a response which is or contains a representation of some element or ~~of~~ arrangement. Even if this were true in some ordinary sense of representation, the whole problem of appropriateness would not be solved, for it would still be necessary to say in exactly what sense a response is or contains a representation; evidently very few responses are or contain representations in the direct pictorial way I have used for an illustration. I am not sure that any ordinary sense can be found in which we could possibly say that most responses which are instances of understanding an expression are or contain representations.

On the question what the difference is between attaching a sense to a word and to a sentence I can offer nothing better than a conjecture. It seems to me that the right definitions may possibly be to this effect; that the response made by a person who hears or reads a word or a sentence in either case is appropriate to an arrangement or a set of arranged elements, that is to say, is or contains a representation of them; the arrangement or the whole set may or may not itself be an element of the world; but the person who attaches a sense to a sentence in addition either believes that there is or believes that there is not such an arrangement in the

world or has an impulse or tendency to believe that there is or an impulse or tendency to believe that there is not. This sort of definition sounds as though it were circular. It would in fact be circular if belief had to be defined, as perhaps it has, in terms of attaching a sense to an expression. But it seems to me just possible that belief is to be otherwise defined; I can not say exactly what the definition by which we should avoid circularity would be, but it would be to the effect that for someone to believe a certain proposition is to have a disposition to act in a way which would be useful to him if the proposition were true.<sup>32</sup> I think there may be an ordinary sense of the word belief which can be defined in this sort of way. This account of belief resembles that which Mr. Braithwaite himself has given in The Nature of believing, Proc. Arist. Soc. 1932-3; though it is not the same, as Mr. Braithwaite included in his analysis not only a disposition to act in a certain way, but a certain mental relation to a proposition which he called entertaining it in thought. I am not at all convinced that this factor has to be included, at any rate for all senses of the word belief. If there is no sense of belief which can be defined without

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<sup>32</sup> This theory could very well be expressed without the use of the word proposition, which I have allowed to stand here for the sake of brevity.



the inclusion of this factor, then my definition of attaching a sense to a sentence seems to be circular after all; but I am inclined to think there is such a sense. There are very considerable difficulties about this sort of definition of belief. The chief of them seems to be that there are some situations in which one seems to have a disposition to act in a way which would be useful if a certain proposition were true although as a matter of *fact* one does not believe the proposition. But I think it may be possible to overcome these difficulties.

I can now sum up the explanation I have given of the ordinary meanings of words and sentences, including all those parts of it which are only suggested very tentatively. A word, according to the sorts of definition I have been suggesting, has an ordinary meaning, if all or most of those who have heard or read it have made a response which has contained a part which was in a certain sense a representation of some element or arrangement of elements of the world, in the sense in which an arrangement is something which may occur, but may not, and if either all or most of the responses have contained representations of the same element or arrangement, or every one of them or nearly every one has belonged to one or another of a definite number of sets, for each of which

there has been only one element or arrangement of which all its members have contained representations. The explanation of the ordinary meaning of a sentence has to have a slightly different form, for I have to allow for sentences which are only used once or a few times, but which may none the less have ordinary meanings; the ordinary meanings of sentences can not be explained in terms of the senses which actually have been attached to them, but only by expressions in a conditional form, and in terms of the senses which would be attached to them in certain circumstances. To make use of all the definitions I have suggested I have to make a very elaborate statement. A sentence has an ordinary meaning, if either there is only one arrangement of elements of the world or set of arranged elements, in the senses in which an arrangement or set is something which might occur, not which necessarily has occurred, such that if anyone knowing the language to which the sentence belongs heard or read the sentence he would be likely to make a response containing a representation of it, or there is a definite number of arrangements or sets such that if anyone heard or read the sentence he would be likely to make a response containing a representation of one or another of them; and if in either case the person hearing or reading the sentence would, if he made a

response of the sort that was probable, either have a disposition to act in a way which would be useful to him if there were in the world the arrangement or set of which his response contained a representation, or have a disposition to act in a way which would be useful to him if there were not, or have a tendency or impulse to have one or the other of these sorts of disposition. I do not think there is any statement we can make to the effect that the ordinary meaning of a word or sentence is something or other. But we can sometimes show what the ordinary meaning of a particular word or sentence is by finding another expression which in the ordinary sense has the same meaning. It is convenient to speak of a word or sentence being correlated with an element of the world or an arrangement or a set of arranged elements, or with several; namely with those elements or arrangements or sets representations of which are connected with the hearing or reading of the expression in the way I have described. Then two expressions have the same meaning if there is at least one element or arrangement or set with which both are correlated. About the correctness of most of the details of this account of meaning I feel quite uncertain; but of the general principle that the ordinary meaning of expressions

is to be defined in terms of their effects on hearers or readers I feel fairly certain.

It seems to me that this view of meaning affects Mr. Braithwaite's theory about the meaning of ethical expressions in two ways. First, it is clear that if, as I have supposed, he wanted to explain the ordinary meaning of these expressions, then he could not prove any conclusion about their meaning by showing that a particular sense is attached to them by those who use them. But this is the way in which he seems to have tried to prove such a conclusion, both in what he said in my quotation about using a word to stand for a constituent of a proposition, and in what he said about judging things good. Secondly, it is reasonable to think that as a matter of fact people generally do use expressions in their ordinary meanings, that is, that the sense attached to an expression by its user is generally the same as that which constitutes, or one of those which constitute, its ordinary meaning. So it will not be very likely that an expression is often used in a particular sense, unless it can be shown that that sense is also its ordinary meaning, or one of the senses that constitute its ordinary meaning. Then it will not be likely that the word good is used in the sort of variety of senses that Mr.

Braithwaite suggested unless it can be shown that its ordinary meaning in the sort of sense I have explained contains or is made up by that variety of senses.

But as I have said, although I do not think Mr. Braithwaite's sort of theory can be true in the form he gave it, I think it can be adapted, so as to produce a theory with a certain formal resemblance to it which is consistent with and supplementary to the theory I have suggested about meaningless uses. We shall then say, in the terms of the theory I suggested, that all ethical uses of expressions are meaningless uses, but that people have generally failed to perceive that this is so because sentences containing ethical expressions are generally partly significant, that is, they have meanings, but there is nothing which is the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Two sorts of mistake have been made about the supposed meanings of expressions in their ethical uses; one by those who have thought that ethical expressions had meanings of a special and peculiar kind, and have therefore given non-naturalistic explanations of their meanings, and the other by those who have thought that all ethical expressions had meanings which could be expressed by means of other expressions, and have therefore given naturalistic explanations of their

meanings. The naturalists have as a rule been less in error than the non-naturalists, because they have generally supposed that ethical expressions were correlated with one or more of a certain set of characters, which, as it happens, actually have a certain connexion with the using of ethical expressions. It is sometimes suggested, for example, that to call something good is to say something about the amount of happiness that will result from it, and sometimes that it is to say something about the speaker's attitude to what he calls good, for instance that he approves of it; and it is suggested by Mr. Braithwaite that to call something good is sometimes to say one of these things, sometimes the other, and sometimes, I suppose, to attribute various other characters to it. All these ascriptions of a meaning to the word good are mistaken, but they have a certain foundation; namely that when people use the word good their use of it is very often accompanied by a belief of one or another of several kinds about the thing which they call good. Sometimes, for instance, when someone uses the word he has at the same time a belief that something will lead to more happiness than some alternative, and sometimes a belief that he has a feeling of approval for some state of affairs, and sometimes

some other kind of belief, although he is in no case saying that he has this or that belief by using a sentence containing the word good. Facts such as these about beliefs and perhaps other states of mind accompanying the use of ethical expressions have caused naturalistic moralists to make various false ascriptions of meaning to ethical expressions, and among naturalists Mr. Braithwaite has come much nearer to the truth than most others, both in recognising the possibility that an ethical use of an expression may be meaningless and in perceiving the variety of the beliefs by which ethical uses of expressions are accompanied.

I have now completed my statement of arguments against and for naturalism, and of a particular naturalistic theory of ethics. The arguments that are adduced against naturalism, including the first two I have stated, are very plausible, yet do not seem to me conclusive. It seems to me that almost all ethical theories that have been proposed so far have been open either to very strong logical or to very strong common sense objections or both. One of the principal recommendations of the naturalistic theory I have stated is that it seems to be much less open to objections of these sorts than most theories of either kind. It is not open, for example,

to the first two sorts of objection to naturalism that I stated, but it does seem to be open, like other naturalistic theories, to some objection of the third sort, so far as the considerations I stated can be allowed to count as a clear objection; and it is I think for reasons of the third sort, and connected reasons which I give elsewhere, that I myself feel very dubious about the theory I have based on a consideration of the nature of meaning, in spite of its neatness. It does seem as though something were left out. But no unobjectionable account of what is left out has been given, and a tendency to feel as though something were the case is not good evidence, but only a reason for seeking evidence. On the whole, the search seems to lead in the direction of some theory like the theory of meaningless uses I have suggested.



#### 4. Reason and reasonableness.

I propose in this chapter to offer some reflexions about the meaning of such words as reason and reasonable. They have in common with such words as good, right, duty, and so on, that they are used to do what would commonly be called expressing valuations of conduct. I have not said so far whether I have meant to include such words as reason in the scope of what I have said about ethical expressions. They differ from the sort of expressions I have instanced in my earlier chapters in that it does not seem as though they can be defined, in most of their uses at least, in ethical terms, whereas it seems as though the expressions I have hitherto considered can be defined in ethical terms, even if as a matter of fact they can not be defined at all in any ordinary sense. According to the theory about meaningless uses suggested in my third chapter, such words as good and right in certain uses can not be defined at all in an ordinary sense; but whether this is so or not, it does seem as though words like these can be defined in terms of each other, and it is very difficult to feel sure, short of accepting the theory about meaningless uses, that some definition of rightness in terms of goodness, or goodness in terms of

rightness, is not correct. It seems worth while to enquire whether, if some sort of theory about the meaningless use of ethical expressions is true, the place that people have mistakenly supposed to be taken by these expressions in expressing opinions about conduct can be filled by expressions about reason; that is, whether some or all of the characters that have been supposed to belong to the supposed meanings of ethical expressions actually belong to the meaning of expressions about reason.

Words such as reason and reasonable are unquestionably used in various different senses. I propose to try to distinguish some of the senses in which we speak about reasons for acting, reasonable behaviour, and so on, and to give analyses or definitions of some of them. I shall try to show, or at least to suggest, that there is no sense of any expression of this sort in which the expression stands for a non-natural character, or is to be defined in terms of a non-natural character, with the exception that there are one or two uses of expressions which are perhaps to be defined in terms of some such ethical character as goodness, if goodness is a character, or at any rate explained in terms of a particular use of the word good. I shall then consider one or two ways in which such expressions are sometimes used by philosophers, and enquire whether what is said in these ways is true.

I shall begin by considering various senses in which we can speak of a reason for an action; and I shall consider next some senses of the word reasonable. We can speak of a reason for an action in various different ways. We can say about an action that someone has not yet performed that he has a reason for performing it, or that there is a reason for him to perform it; and about an action that he has performed, that he had a reason for performing it, or that there was a reason. We can also say that he has a good reason, or that there is a good reason and that there was a good reason, and so on. We can also say that something is the reason or a reason or a good reason for someone to act in a certain way, or the reason or a reason for which someone did act in a certain way. There is one sort of sense in which some of these expressions are sometimes used which I do not want to discuss, and which is certainly different from those that I shall discuss; I may as well illustrate this sort of sense and dismiss it at once. Consider such a sentence as the reason for his eating so much was that he was very hungry. It is just possible that such a sentence as this could be used in one of the senses I want to discuss, but it seems to me quite clear that in the sense in which it would be most likely to be used the word reason simply has exactly the same sense which the word cause would have in a sentence beginning the cause of his eating so

much. So I may as well say in advance that I do not want to examine any uses of the word reason in which to say that something is a reason is to say that it is a cause, and to say only that. For I only want to consider those senses of the word reason in which it stands for something which has a special connexion with human behaviour. It seems to me that anything which is said to be the reason or a reason for a certain action, actual or possible, in any of the senses with which I am concerned, is always either something to do with a desire on the part of the actual or possible agent or something to do with means by which such a desire might be fulfilled. Consider such a sentence as his reason for taking the medicine was that he wanted to sleep well, and such a sentence as his reason for taking the medicine was that he thought it would make him sleep well. It seems as though in the situation which would be described by these sentences there are two factors, each of which is said to be someone's reason for doing something; one of them is a desire for a certain result, the other is a belief that a certain action will have a certain result. I think it is clear that what is a reason in either of these senses is a certain kind of cause; but to say that it is a reason is not merely to say that it is a cause. I think I can see more or less how these uses of the word reason are to be analysed.

I think the first sentence has the same meaning as his desire to sleep well caused him to take the medicine, and he believed that taking it was a means to sleeping well; and the second the same meaning as his belief that the medicine would make him sleep well caused him to take it, and he wanted to sleep well.<sup>33</sup> Since both the sentences I am interpreting might express facts about the same occasion, if these interpretations are correct we must obviously be able to use the word cause in such a sense that if a certain event or state of affairs caused a certain other it does not follow that no other caused it. I think we do often use the word in such a sense.

If these explanations of two uses of the word reason are more or less right, a reason in these uses is a mental event or disposition of one or another of two kinds, a desire or a belief. It is fairly clear that in that case statements that someone had a reason for some act he performed, or that there was a reason, can be explained in the same sort of way. Their meaning will be that he had some desire which he believed would be fulfilled as a result of the act in question, and that the desire or the belief or

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<sup>33</sup> We might speak of someone's reason for acting in a certain way, taking medicine, for example, on an occasion on which he is not aware of any desire or belief, but acts from habit; but the desire and the belief caused him to form the habit.

both caused him to perform the act. The explanation to be given of reasons for a possible action, an action not yet performed, must be different. Nothing has yet caused such an action, when we speak about it, and it is not certain that anything ever will. So to say that someone has a reason for acting in a certain way, or that there is a reason for his acting in that way, can not be to say anything about what has caused or will cause the act described. I think that such words as reason are probably used in more different senses about possible actions than they are about actions that have been performed. There is one of these senses which is closely connected with the sense I have tried to explain in which the word reason is used about actual actions. When we say that someone has a reason for performing a certain action what we say may mean that he has a desire which he believes would be fulfilled as a result of that action. When we say that there is a reason for someone to act in a certain way what we say may mean that he has a desire which as a matter of fact that sort of action would be likely to satisfy, whether or not he is aware that this is so. I have explained these two sorts of expression that we can use in the ways that seem most appropriate to them; but as a matter of fact I think both sentences beginning in such a way as he has a reason and in such a way as there is

a reason can be used in either sort of sense; can be used, that is, either to say that someone has a desire and a certain sort of belief about it, as to say that someone has a desire and there is a certain sort of fact about it. This special duplication of senses does not happen when we are speaking about actual, not possible, actions, as there is then no question of referring to facts about the agent's desires which were not known to him. There does not seem to be a similar duplication of senses when we say that something is a reason for someone to act in a certain way. It seems as though when we mention as a reason for a possible action on someone's part a desire of his, or something about a means of satisfying it, it is usually clear whether we are speaking about what he thinks would be a means or about something which actually would. If, for example, I use such a sentence as a reason for him to insure his life is that he wants to provide for his family, I think it is pretty clear that what I mean is something to the effect that he wants to provide for his family, and to insure his life would be a means of doing it, whether he thinks so or not. The meaning seems to be the same if I use such a sentence as a reason for him to insure his life is that it would enable him to provide for his family. It seems that on the whole we are less likely to mention

someone's belief about the means of satisfying one of his desires in speaking about a possible action than in speaking about an action he has performed: if we did, we should probably use a sentence to the effect that a reason for his doing something is that he believes it would produce a certain result.

I am afraid that I have only treated a small selection from the ways in which we can speak about a reason, as distinct from a good reason. I have said nothing, for example, about the sense in which a phrase about someone's reason for a past action means the reason he alleged or would have alleged; or the senses in which we can give as a reason for an actual or possible action by somebody, not a desire of his or a fact or belief about the means of satisfying a desire, but some state of affairs which someone wants to counteract or provide against, or which causes him to have some desire; for instance that his health is bad, or that he sleeps badly. I hope it is not necessary for me to treat separately all these uses, which I think can be defined on the same sort of lines as those I have considered, that is which seem to be related in one way or another to a situation forming a sort of practical syllogism. The parts of such a situation are a desire, a fact or a belief about the way in which the desire could be fulfilled, and an action. I think it will be clear that



the senses in which we speak about a reason for acting in a certain way are quite different from the sense or senses in which we speak about a reason for thinking or believing something. A reason for thinking or believing is to be defined without any reference to desire, but simply in terms of the certainty or probability which a belief has in view of the thing said to be a reason, or perhaps in view of that in conjunction with other grounds.

I want to consider two other ways in which people might possibly speak of a reason for an action, before I go on to consider good reasons. People might, I think, speak as though a certain sort of fact would be a reason for an action even in the absence of any connected desire, namely a fact that a certain action was or would be the best in the circumstances, or the right action. It might be said that in that case there was a reason for performing the action whether one hoped to satisfy any desire by performing it or not, or even that there was a reason for wanting to perform it. I have suggested in my third chapter that perhaps there are no facts that anything is right or best, because when we use these words as I have above they are being used in a meaningless way. But it seems to me that even if that suggestion is false, as it may be, to speak of the rightness or goodness of an action as a reason for performing it or wanting to perform it,

even for someone who has no desire to which its performance is in any way related, is either a mistaken or at any rate a misleading way of speaking; I am not sure which, for a mistaken way of speaking, if it is used often enough, can become correct but misleading.<sup>34</sup> Supposing the ethical uses of such words as good and right have a sense, then the rightness or goodness of an action may be a reason, not for acting, but for thinking in a certain way; for instance, for thinking that it would be a good thing if the action were performed, or if someone wanted to perform it. Again, the rightness or goodness of an action would be a reason for someone to perform it if it happened that he wanted to do what is right or good. But I can not see how the rightness or goodness of an action could be a reason for acting in a certain way, or wanting so to act, except in a sense which would be defined in terms of one or another of these facts; that is, the facts that the rightness or goodness of an action might be a reason for thinking in a certain way, or might be a reason for someone to act in a certain way if in addition he wanted to do what is right or good.

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34 It is correct, but perhaps misleading, to speak of unconscious mental states or events. This would once, I think, have been incorrect.

The second way in which people might, I think, speak of a reason for an action seems to me certainly a mistaken way of speaking. Supposing a reason is suggested for acting in a certain way which displays some character which is commonly disapproved of, for example, selfishness, someone may say such a thing as that isn't a reason. It seems to me that in such a case the thought the speaker meant to express would be something either to the effect that that would not be a reason for him or that the reason given was not a good reason, was morally objectionable, or something of that sort.<sup>35</sup> But it does not seem to me that there is any sense which allows us to say that a reason can not have either of these defects.

I am afraid that the account I have given of the way in which we speak of a reason for acting is very incomplete, and perhaps inaccurate in parts; but I hope I have said enough to suggest that all the senses in which we commonly speak about a reason, as distinct from a good reason, for acting can be defined in terms of something to do with desires and the means by which they might be satisfied,

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<sup>35</sup> Supposing the theory about meaningless uses suggested in my third chapter is true, there will be a fresh problem to solve; how are we to analyse sentences saying, for instance, that someone thinks something good? It is just possible that there can be such a thing as a meaningless thought, in some sense; though this would not be the best way of describing it, for we do not usually say that thoughts have meanings. But in any case it ~~seems~~ seems that people sometimes use nonsense in the belief that they are expressing thoughts.

although I know I have not said enough to prove this. I shall next consider some of the ways in which we speak about a good reason for acting. I hope I shall be able to point them out rather more briefly than I was able to point out the senses of the first sort of expression. I shall take these expressions in the some sort of order in which I took the corresponding expressions of the first sort. We may say that someone's reason for acting in a certain way in which he did act was a certain desire, or a certain belief that the action in question would lead to the satisfying of a desire, and that that reason was a good reason. And we may say that he had a good reason or there was a good reason for acting in a certain way. About actions not yet performed, we may say that there is a good reason for someone to act in a certain way, or that he has a good reason. And we may say that a certain desire felt by someone, or a certain fact or a certain belief of his about the means by which some desire could be satisfied, is or would be a good reason for him to act in a certain way, or that he has in it a good reason for acting in a certain way. It seems to me that there are at least two ways in which expressions of this sort may be used. It seems to me that when we call something a good reason or say there is a good reason we may simply be saying that it is or

there is a reason in one of the senses I have already tried to explain, and in addition that the action for which we say it is or there is a reason really would lead or really would be likely to lead to the desired result. I think all the sorts of expression I have described can have some such sense as this. But I think that all or most of them can also be used in quite another way. I think when we call something a good reason or say there is a good reason we may be saying that it would be a good thing for a certain desire to be satisfied, and that a certain action would be a means of satisfying it, or that it would be a good thing for a certain result to be produced, and that a certain action would be a means of producing it. It seems as though part of the meaning of a statement that there is a good reason in this sense would always be that there is a good reason in the other sense I tried to point out. But it seems as though part of the meaning would also be that something would be good in one of the ethical senses or uses of that word. Then if the suggestion made in my third chapter about meaningless uses is true, in this use the phrase good reason will be meaningless, or will in a certain sense be partly meaningless if we allow that this use includes the meaning of good reason in the other sense. But if the suggestion I

made is not true, then the meaning of the phrase good reason in this second use is to be explained in terms of the meaning, whatever it may be, of the word good.

I have now tried to give an account of the meaning of such expressions as a reason or a good reason for a certain action, in which although I have not been able to examine all the ways in which such expressions are used, I hope I have been able to point out enough of their uses to suggest that what they mean can always be defined in terms of people's desires and of means of satisfying them, with perhaps one exception. It seems to me that the only exception to this principle is made by those uses of the phrase good reason in which an ethical use of the word good seems to occur; and that the meaning of these uses is to be explained in the terms I have described, and, in addition, of whatever explanation is to be given of the meaning of the word good, whether in terms of meaningless uses or in some other way. If this is so, then it follows that all the senses in which expressions about a reason for acting are used can be defined in terms which do not include any non-natural character, unless there is some such character for which such ethical expressions as the word good sometimes stand, in which case one or two of the expressions about reasons would be defined in terms of

that character.

Next I have to consider the various senses of the word reasonable, which I fear are even harder to treat exhaustively or to classify. We can speak of reasonable behaviour, a reasonable person, a reasonable action, prospect, objection, chance, proposal, price, belief, probability, and so on. I cannot possibly examine the senses in which all the different types of thing are said to be reasonable which we do call reasonable. There is one set of uses of the word all of whose members I can certainly exclude; that set, namely, whose meanings can be defined in terms of some proposition or statement or belief or happening following from or being made likely by some other, but without reference to the probable effects of a particular action or piece of behaviour of a particular person. Out of the instances I gave of things which can be called reasonable, I can probably exclude on this ground chances, beliefs, probabilities, and probably in some senses prospects and objections. But there seem to be a great many uses of the word which cannot be excluded on this account, and I am forced to confine myself to a small selection. I shall therefore consider the senses in which we can speak of a reasonable person or action, and reasonable behaviour; and besides these phrases I shall

consider certain uses of the word reasonable when it is not part of a phrase of this sort.

The third of the phrases I mentioned I can dismiss very briefly. It seems to me that probably every sense of the phrase reasonable behaviour is the same as some sense of the phrase behaviour of a reasonable person; so I only need to consider more fully the two remaining phrases. Of these, I think the phrase reasonable action is the more easily explained. One sense of this phrase has I think a fairly clear relation to a sense in which we speak about a reason for acting; an action was reasonable in this sense if there was a good reason for it in the sense that the agent rightly thought that it would lead or was likely to lead to a desired result. Similarly a possible action would be a reasonable action on someone's part if it would lead or would be likely to lead to a result which he desires. There is a second sense, which may perhaps be definable in terms of the first, in which a reasonable action is simply the action of a reasonable person, in some sense of this latter phrase; this should perhaps be called a group of senses, corresponding to several senses in which we can speak about a reasonable person. There may, I think, be senses in which we speak of reasonable action other than these two, but these seem to be the principal



and commonest senses. It is clear that the first sense can be defined in terms which do not include any non-natural character; whether the second can be so defined will depend upon the interpretation to be given to the expression reasonable person.

I am afraid that this phrase is used in a great variety of ways. A reasonable person may, I think, be a person most of whose actions are reasonable actions in the first sense I pointed out, or who performs more reasonable actions than most people, or something of that kind. Secondly, he may be a person who usually thinks clearly. Thirdly, perhaps someone who both acts reasonably and thinks clearly. Fourthly, someone who will hear reason, who is open to argument. Fifthly, someone who habitually reflects before speaking or acting, or does not speak or act impulsively. These are some of the senses in which we can speak about a reasonable person, and there are certainly others. Of those senses I have mentioned I have only given brief and approximate definitions. But I think it will be clear that the terms in which these uses would be defined do not include any non-natural character. It seems to me probable that each of the other senses in which we can speak of a reasonable person stands in some fairly close relation to one or another of the senses I have tried to define. If that is so, and it is hard to be sure about such a point, then we may take it that there

is no sense in which any expression about a reasonable person stands for or has to be defined in terms of a non-natural character.

It remains for me to say a little about the use of the word reasonable when it is not joined with a noun in this way. A great many uses of the word can certainly be interpreted in terms of reasonable actions, people and so on, but a certain number remain which seem to be less straightforward. It is easy to think, for instance, that to say that it is reasonable to be reasonable, or it is reasonable to act reasonably, makes sense and is not tautological. It seems to me that as a matter of fact sentences like these are exceptionally ambiguous, and could scarcely have a clear sense in any circumstances. Obviously they could have senses that would be tautological -- that to be reasonable is to be reasonable, and to act reasonably is to act reasonably and so on. Probably, as Mr. R. B. Braithwaite has said,<sup>36</sup> 'we always try to interpret a question as a question that can be asked "with significance"'. So we are inclined to think of sentences like these I am considering as being used in some non-tautological sense if possible. There are, it seems to me, a great many non-

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<sup>36</sup> On page 145 of proc. arist. soc. 1927-8.

tautological senses they could have, so many as to prevent them from having any sense, to put it paradoxically; or to put it without paradox, they have so many senses in one sense, namely senses which the constituent words and the syntax allow, that they have no sense in another sense, namely no sense which they could be used to communicate. For example, to say that it is reasonable to be reasonable might be to say that there is a reason or there are reasons for performing reasonable actions, which would probably be a tautology; or that there are reasons for being willing to hear reason, or for habitually reflecting before acting; or a number of other things. A similar variety of interpretations can be found for a statement that it is reasonable to act reasonably. I think it seems very probable that all these interpretations would be of one or the other of the two kinds I have illustrated, that is, such as to make the sentences I am considering either mere tautologies or synthetic statements which may quite well be false. But the difficulty of deciding whether they are tautologies or not may give them a deceptive air of being synthetic necessary truths. And I think it also seems very probable that no interpretation would have to be given in which any non-natural character would be mentioned.

The incomplete and cursory review I have made of some of the ways in which we use such words as reason and

reasonable does, I think, suggest that there is no sense of such expressions as these in which they stand for a non-natural character, or something to be defined in terms of a non-natural character, with one possible exception that has been mentioned. I think this review also tends to show something else, which I do not know how to put very clearly; that, as Hume said,<sup>37</sup> reason is the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. Hume's language is very obscure and metaphorical, and what he meant by saying in addition that reason ought only to be the slave of the passions I do not pretend to know. But I shall try to say shortly what I think Hume meant by the other part of his conclusion, the part with which, if my interpretation of it is right, I agree. The conclusion to which I am led by considering the meaning of expressions about reason, and which I think Hume probably shared, is that there is no sense in which there can be a reason for desiring or wishing for something, such that the reason has no connexion with any other desire or wish of the person concerned.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Treatise of human nature, book II, part III § III.

<sup>38</sup> I think it worth while to define the sense in which I am using the expression there can be a reason. I am saying here that there is no sense of reason such that it makes sense to say that there is a reason for desiring something, and to say that the reason has no connexion with any other desire of the person concerned.

I shall conclude by considering briefly one or two ways in which philosophers have spoken about reason which seem to me mistaken. I think there is a particular kind of mistake which turns upon the supposition that there are possible reasons for desiring something which are unconnected with other desires. Professor J.S. Mackenzie in his Manual of Ethics<sup>39</sup> criticised the opinion of Hume that I have mentioned, and in doing so wrote of what he called reason as a motive. 'Reason . . . . may', he said, 'set before us ends or motives which for an irrational being would not exist at all.' Language of a connected kind was used by Rashdall in the theory of good and evil.<sup>40</sup> He wrote 'if an intuition . . . . persists after a due consideration of all the consequences of yielding to it, it may probably be taken to represent not merely a feeling, but a feeling to which the moral Reason attributes intrinsic value.' The sort of argument which would be used by writers who refer to reason in such ways is I think something like this. There are some things to which reason, or the moral reason, attributes goodness or intrinsic value. When reason does this it sets before us ends or motives; that is to say, if reason attributes

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39 Third edition, book I, ch.II § 10.

40 Book I. ch. VII. § VI.

intrinsic value to something, that is a reason for bringing that thing into existence; or if it is a tendency or feeling to which intrinsic value is attributed, then a reason for yielding to that tendency or that feeling.

It seems to me that there is something wrong about expressions and statements of this kind. Unquestionably the things which are reasons in one sense of the word reason are also motives. The reason for which someone acted in a certain way are the desires and beliefs which led him to act in that way, and these were also motives. But of course no fact related to this fact could possibly be expressed by saying that reason is a motive or that reason sets before us motives. I think that probably professor Mackenzie and Rashdall considered that there were facts that certain things were intrinsically good, and that these facts could not have been otherwise; that, in other words, that a certain thing is good is a necessary or a priori truth. It seems quite clear that if there are facts that certain things are intrinsically good, that is, if the ethical uses of expressions are not meaningless uses, these are certainly not facts that could not have been otherwise. For if they were, then to say that anything is good which in fact is not would be self-contradictory; and in that case, whenever people have disagreed about the intrinsic goodness of anything, one party has been

upholding a necessary truth, the other a contradiction. If this were so, it would be very strange that no one has observed it, and shown in exactly what way false opinions about the goodness of something were self-contradictory. It is very hard to think that, if ethical uses of expressions are not meaningless, the facts they are used to express are anything but facts which could have been otherwise, which it makes sense to deny, and knowledge of which would be of the sort called empirical. But even if ethical truths were necessary truths, in what sense would reason be setting before us motives ? If someone's reason had recognised a necessary ethical truth, then, if he wanted to do what was good or right, his recognition of that truth might be a reason for him to act in a certain way; and if he actually did so act, his recognition of the ethical truth would also have been a motive. Again, if there are ethical facts, the rightness or goodness of a certain course of action may well be a reason for thinking that it would be a good thing if someone acted in a certain way. But no ethical fact or ethical truth, whether necessary or not, could be a reason for someone to act in a certain way by itself; it could only be a reason if also the person concerned wanted to do what was right or good.

I shall now sum up the three which seem to me the most interesting of the results which may be tentatively

drawn from these reflexions. First, that in a certain sense there is no special ethical notion connected with reason; or in other words, that there is no sense in which we talk about reason in which the expression we use stands for a non-natural character, or which has to be defined in terms of a non-natural character; except that there may be some sense which is to be defined in terms of such a character for which some obviously ethical expression, such as the word good or right, sometimes stands -- in that case the ethical notion involved would not be what I called a special ethical notion. Secondly, that there are reasons for being reasonable, or that it is reasonable to be reasonable, is not, in those senses which are most likely to be used, a necessary truth, however strong a prejudice one may have in favour of being reasonable; and that whether there actually are reasons for it, whether it is reasonable for a certain person, depends upon that person's wishes. Thirdly, a conclusion connected with the second, and having a certain practical effect, it is not open to us to call behaviour of which we disapprove unreasonable, simply because of moral objections to it; no kind of behaviour can be discovered to be reasonable or unreasonable simply on moral grounds;



whether behaviour is reasonable must depend also upon  
the desires or wishes of the person who behaves.

## 5 Conclusion

I have now tried to show what philosophical method and point of view I favour, and how I think they are to be applied to ethics. I have explained that the ethical theory to which I feel less objection on the whole than to any other is the theory expressed by professor Moore in Principia Ethica and elsewhere, and in my second chapter I have tried to show why I am not satisfied by that theory, by criticising that part of it which in a sense gives the key to the rest, the part consisting of professor Moore's account of intrinsic goodness; this part gives the key to the other parts in the sense that according to professor Moore it is in terms of intrinsic goodness that all other ethical expressions are to be defined or explained. In my third chapter I have examined a type of definition or explanation of the word good and other ethical words entirely opposed to professor Moore's, namely the naturalistic type; I have considered certain general reasons in favour of and against any sort or most sorts of naturalism, but have admitted that the arguments do not seem to be conclusive on either side; I have then put forward in detail a particular naturalistic explanation of the use or meaning of ethical expressions, which

seems not to be exposed to many of the objections that can be brought against most sorts of naturalism; but I admit that it is not at all clear to me that this special theory is true. In my fourth chapter I have examined the various meanings of words like reason and reasonable, which seem to need a different treatment from most of the words which may be called ethical words, but which have in common with ethical words that they are used to do what it is natural to call expressing valuations of conduct. I come to the conclusion that there are no senses of these words which have to be defined in terms of non-natural characters, unless certain other words, such as good, sometimes stand for non-natural characters, in which case such an expression as good reason may sometimes have to be defined in such terms.

I propose in this final chapter to mention a special cause of ambiguity or obscurity of meaning which seems to affect ethical expressions, and may account for part of the difficulty of interpreting them which has appeared in this essay, and is very often acknowledged in books about ethics. I am not aware that this special cause of difficulty has been pointed out before. I shall then consider what difference, if any, is likely to be made, in their use of ethical expressions, by people who are

convinced that the somewhat sceptical theory suggested in my third chapter is true; and I shall suggest a way in which, by acting in the way in which we should if the theory were true, and reflecting on the results of doing so, we can test the truth of the theory. Finally, I shall suggest that there are one or two circumstances which seem often to accompany uses of ethical expressions in a way which seems to have a regular connexion with the thoughts or feelings of the speaker or writer, and that these circumstances may help us to understand the use of ethical expressions, whether they enable us to define them or not.

The special cause of ambiguity or obscurity which I mentioned is that some ethical expressions seem to have uses, which are probably quite different from most of those that may be called their ethical uses, in which they quite plainly can be defined in terms of mental happenings; and that if the peculiarity of these uses is not perceived, it may be thought that some sentence containing a word in such a use expresses a necessary ethical truth, or at any rate some ethical truth which is quite obvious and undeniable. Some sentences from the meaning of good<sup>41</sup>, a dialogue by the late Lowes Dickinson, may illustrate the way in which

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<sup>41</sup> 5th edition, pages 6 and 7.

the sort of use I have described may insensibly intrude among other uses of an ethical expression. I am not certain that Lowes Dickinson made the sort of mistake that I want to point out, but I think it looks as though such a mistake must, at any rate, have determined the choice of some of his expressions. 'When it comes to the point you act, and are practically bound to act, upon your opinion about what is good, as though you did believe it to be true.' 'My notion is that what systematises a life is choice; and choice, I believe, means choice of what we hold to be good.' 'But are there not men who deliberately choose what they think bad, like Milton's Satan - "Evil be thou my Good"? Yes, but by the very terms of the expression he was choosing what he thought good; only he thought that evil was good.' In the passage from which these sentences are taken Lowes Dickinson was, I think, defending the opinion that people as a rule or always make choices and direct their actions by reference to what they believe to be good; this is an empirical conclusion which may be true and may be false, and for and against which reasons can be given. But the way in which he expressed this conclusion was I think affected by the fact that the word good can be used in another way than that with which he was concerned; in such a sense that to say that it

seemed good to someone to act in a certain way simply means that he chose to act in that way; and <sup>that</sup> consequently to say that everyone always chooses what seems good to him, or what he thinks good, is a tautology. I think the mistake is sometimes made of thinking that sentences like this, used in the sense I am pointing out, express necessary or at any rate undeniable truths about goodness in some ethical sense; this is certainly a mistake, for whether the ethical uses of the word good have meanings or definable meanings, or on the other hand are meaningless, it seems quite clear that the word is constantly used in other ways than to say that something seems or is thought good, and that consequently it is used in ways which can not be defined in terms of choice. I think Lowes Dickinson was not entirely free from this mistake. People not only act upon their opinion about what is good, he wrote, but are practically bound so to act; the phrase practically bound was perhaps suggested by an inclination to think that what was being expressed was not merely an empirical conclusion, but something like a necessary truth; though a different explanation is given in the succeeding sentences. Again, choice, he wrote, means choice of what we hold to be good; that you can not choose anything but what you think good is the principle from

which this seems to follow, but the reason for believing that principle is only that to think something good in the appropriate sense simply is to choose it. If there are any people who choose what they think bad, they must none the less be also choosing in some way what they think good. I do not suggest that Lowes Dickinson arrived at these conclusions simply as a result of the mistake I am describing, but I think it probably contributed to making up his mind, and to his choice of expressions. I think that the fact that there are uses of such words as good in which they have meanings of the kind I have described is probably one of the causes that have made people inclined to think that some or all ethical sentences expressed necessary truths. If so, this is a special case of a cause of error, or of erroneous reasoning, which is I think fairly common; the confusion between different senses of a sentence in one of which it expresses a tautology and in another of which it expresses an empirical conclusion, which may be true and may be false, a confusion from which the result follows that an empirical conclusion is thought

to have some sort of certainty or necessity.<sup>42</sup>

I think I have admitted, both here and in other parts of this essay, the great difficulty of seeing at all clearly what the meanings of ethical expressions are, if they have meanings. But if the sceptical theory that they have no meanings, which is expressed in my third chapter, is true, or if there are strong reasons in its favour, when we have seen that this is so, what difference will be made to the way in which we use such expressions? We shall, I suppose, try to distinguish between our different motives for using words, and try to detect which the occasions are on which we want to use an expression wholly or *chiefly* to produce some action or feeling on the part of some hearer or reader, and which are those on which we want to communicate a statement. We shall note that on the occasions in the former set, in using ethical expressions

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42 I have pointed out what seems to be another case of this confusion in my fourth chapter, on page 141. I think that in the same sort of way in which the conclusion that people always choose what they think good may be deduced from the tautology that they always choose what they choose, in a disguised form, psychological hedonism and psychological egoism are perhaps sometimes deduced from the tautologies I like what I like, and I want what I want.



we shall very likely be taking the most effective means of realising our purpose, but that on the occasions in the latter set, if we introduce an ethical expression, as habit will very likely prompt us to do, we shall be using an expression which is partly meaningless, and so shall at best be making our statement in an imperfect way. And to reflect in this way on our motives for using words may, I think, be part of a very useful method of testing the truth of the theory I am speaking of. On all occasions on which we feel an inclination to use a sentence containing some ethical expression, provided we are addressing comparatively sophisticated hearers or readers, we may ask ourselves whether some other sentence can be found which, whether or not it has the same meaning, will serve our purpose for the moment, and which leaves out the ethical expression; and we may form the habit of using as much as possible these substituted expressions. We may then ask ourselves whether as a result of using the substituted expressions we are habitually leaving out part of what we think and want to say. If we find it hard to discover expressions which can be substituted, and if we conclude that when we use substituted expressions there is always or nearly always some part of what we think and want to say which is left out, we may

reasonably infer that the theory about meaningless uses is not true, and in fact that no naturalistic ethical theory is true. But if we find that other expressions can always or nearly always be substituted for ethical expressions, and if it seems that no part of what we think and want to say is left out as a result, we may infer that some naturalistic theory is true; supposing, further, it seems that when we are inclined to use one of the substituted expressions and try to replace it by an ethical expression, part of what we think and want to say is being left out, we may infer that the true naturalistic theory is the theory about meaningless uses.

I am afraid that I have left my answer to the question what, if anything, ethical expressions mean very inconclusive. There are one or two considerations about the situations in which ethical expressions are used, which I have reserved to the end; I think they are not unconnected with the question I have mentioned, but it is not clear to me that they enable us to answer it. First, there is a certain sort of inference which I think can often be made from the fact that someone has used a certain ethical expression. Suppose someone has used such words as it would be a good thing to return to free trade, and there is reason to think that he used

them in good faith, we can infer from the fact that he has used these words that he is in favour of returning to free trade, or would like free trade to be restored; and we can make these inferences in certain quite ordinary senses of the expressions I have used. The sense in which we should say in ordinary English that someone is in favour of free trade is, I think a clear and precise sense, although the statement we make is very general, since there are many different kinds of happening on account of any of which we can say that someone is in favour of something, or would like something. Again, if someone has said I think it would be a good thing to return to free trade, we can probably make the same inference as in the other case; but in addition it seems as though it follows from the statement that he has made, quite apart from the fact that he has made it, that he is in favour of free trade, though of course what follows need not be true unless the premiss is true. But neither of these facts enables us to say that the meaning or part of the meaning of the sentence it would be a good thing to return to free trade simply is the same as the meaning of I am in favour of free trade, even if they suggest that this is so. We should only be justified in saying that, if it could be shown that what is meant by I am in

favour of free trade follows from what is meant by it would be a good thing to return to free trade. If that were so, it would be reasonable to think that the meaning or part of the meaning of the word good in a certain use could be defined in terms of someone being in favour of something. It is possible that there is a use of the word which does allow such a definition, but there seems to be at least one strong objection to such a definition; that if it were correct, sentences containing the word good, or some of them, would, simply because they contained that word, be in a certain sense about the person who had spoken or written the sentence. Of course this objection is not conclusive, because a definition or analysis may be correct even if it is surprising. But it suffices to make it unreasonable to conclude that a definition of the sort I have mentioned would be correct, simply on the strength of the two inferences which I have said that we can make. So in view of the considerations so far put forward, all we can say is that when someone says that something is or would be good, he very probably is as a matter of fact in favour of the thing he calls good.

My second consideration about the situations in which ethical expressions are used concerns those

beliefs which accompany the use of such expressions, other than beliefs, if they are beliefs, that something is good or right. It seems to me that when someone says that a certain course of action would be good as a means, he very likely at the same time has a belief, not, I should say, simply that such an action would increase happiness, but perhaps that it would increase the happiness of a certain set of people in a certain way, or something at least as determinate as this. Again, if someone says that a certain state of affairs would be intrinsically good, or good on the whole, he may at the same time have a belief that in that state of affairs many people in a certain group would be happy in a certain way, or would be engaged in a certain sort of intellectual activity, or something of that kind. The sort of belief I am trying to describe would be very much more determinate than mere beliefs about happiness or activity in general; consequently the belief involved on almost every occasion would be different from the belief on every other occasion. Suppose we thought that goodness could be defined in terms of the beliefs I have described, there would be two methods of defining it that we might adopt. We might say that the word good was a very general expression, and that to call something good was to say

that one had some belief or other of a certain kind. Such a definition would have the advantage, that if it were correct, though it might be necessary to distinguish several ethical senses of the word good, such as it is customary to distinguish, it would not be necessary to suppose that the word's senses were immensely varied and almost beyond classification. Under the second sort of definition we might give, the senses of the word good probably would be immensely varied; for the second sort of definition would be to say that the word is not a very general expression, but on different occasions there are different beliefs which someone says that he has, by calling something good; and that what exactly the belief is that someone says he has depends partly upon the subject of which he is speaking. I am inclined to think that this second sort of definition may very well be a true account of a way in which the word good and other ethical words are sometimes used, though I do not see any strong reason for believing any definition of the first sort; and I shall try to construct the second sort of definition in more detail.

Suppose the word good or some other ethical expression is used within a group of acquaintances each of whom is fairly familiar with the feelings and opinions

of the rest; or suppose it is used within some group of people who have met for a clearly understood common purpose, for example a committee to dispense relief to the unemployed; and suppose in such a group some practical question is being discussed about what is to be done in a particular situation; then it is very likely that if someone advocates a certain course, in words in which he calls something good, he has at the same time a belief that the action he is advocating will increase the happiness of a certain set of people in a particular way, or some equally determinate belief. I think it is also not unlikely, given the conditions I have described, that some at least of his hearers will be aware that he is having the belief which in fact he has. If this is so, there is a very obvious suggestion we may make about the meaning of the word good, and of other ethical expressions, when used in the circumstances I have described. We may say that in such circumstances these expressions are used in a great variety of senses, and that the exact sense in which an expression is used depends upon the interests and aims which the people among whom it is being used have in common, or the interests and aims on the part of each other which they are familiar with; so that, since an indefinite variety of interests and aims is

possible, there is no way of giving an exhaustive catalogue of the senses in which the expressions can be used. But we shall add that all the senses within this large group have something in common. There are two alternative accounts that we may give of what these senses have in common, and I am not sure which has more in its favour. We may say that in all these senses the sentence containing an ethical expression means either that its user believes that a certain comparatively determinate action would have a certain comparatively determinate result, or that he believes that a certain comparatively determinate state of affairs would have a certain comparatively determinate intrinsic nature. Or we may say that in all the senses in question the sentence that is used means simply either that a certain action would have a certain result, or that a certain state of affairs would have a certain intrinsic nature. The difference on which these alternatives rest is the difference between saying that one has a certain belief and expressing a certain belief. In either case the result or the intrinsic nature involved is either something which most of the members of the group I described would like to be realised, or something which they are aware that the user of the sentence would like to be realised.



It seems to me not improbable<sup>e</sup> that the word good and other ethical expressions are used in the way I have just described. Even if they are, there must I think be a great many other uses that remain unexplained. Some of the remainder may be explicable or definable in terms of someone being in favour of something; and some may be explicable or definable in a way which combines the complicated explanation I have just given with an explanation in terms of someone being in favour of something. But I doubt whether all can be explained in these ways. If the account I have just suggested of the meaning of such words as good, when they are used among people who can assume that they have a certain community of interest or purpose, is true, this use of the words gives a good illustration of a general principle I suggested in my introductory chapter;<sup>43</sup> the general principle that there are many uses of words in which their meaning can not be discovered without examining a large number of circumstances accompanying their use, and that very often,

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<sup>43</sup> On pages 19-23.

at least, there is no single simple means of pointing out that sense of an expression which one wants to consider. When this principle has been put into application, perhaps many of the difficulties which have been encountered in this essay will disappear.

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Part 2

## Meaning and generality

by Austin E. Duncan-Jones

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## Meaning and Generality.

(Austin E. Duncan-Jones)

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### 1. Introductory.

The topics to be considered in this essay fall into three *principal* groups: first, the analysis of meaning; second, the analysis of generality; third, the consideration of certain incidental questions, the chief of which is the bearing of a theory of meaning upon the truth or falsity of some form of solipsism. The first group of topics occupies sections 2 - 9 and 15 and 16; the second group sections 10 - 14; and the third group sections 17, 18, and 19. I regard the analysis of meaning and the analysis of generality as interdependent, in the sense that one analysis can only be moved a stage forward if at the same time a corresponding advance is made in the other, and that a complete solution of one problem involves a complete solution of the other. Thus this essay may be said to be concerned with a single topic in which it is convenient to distinguish two aspects. I hope to reach a certain point in the analysis of meaning and generality, but do not claim to give the final analysis.

Meaning is used in several senses, but in all the senses with which I deal meaning is a character of words or combinations of words, or non-verbal symbols or their combinations. To ask for the analysis of meaning is rather like asking for the analysis of ancestry or causation. One might give an answer by saying that



ancestry is that character or property which someone has in virtue of having the particular parents grandparents and so on whom he did have. But it would be much more simple and straightforward to give the analysis of George I was an ancestor of George V, or x was an ancestor of y, or a was a cause of b. Similarly it is much more convenient to consider the analysis of meaning by considering sentences which state that some expression has a certain meaning. So I shall constantly be examining sentences like [chat means cat], [writing means doing this], [il est parti means he has gone], [my pen is on the table means that this is on that]<sup>1</sup>.

In asking for an analysis I am always considering some expression, or form of expression (as when one substitutes x for George V), and asking for some other expression which has the same meaning as the expression first considered, but which also corresponds more exactly with that meaning, or with what is meant, than the original expression does. This is not an analysis of analysis; I do not want to decide here the question whether analysis is fundamentally concerned with facts or propositions or sentences, but shall assume that it can proceed by the method

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(that is, underlining)

1. Symbolism: italics/are used, here and throughout, to indicate that the italicised expression is being referred to as an expression, and not used significantly; when it is necessary to refer to an expression which itself contains an expression referred to in this way, the contained expression is italicised and the containing expression enclosed in square brackets.



of performing a particular sort of operation upon sentences. To analyse analysis I should have to explain how an expression can correspond more exactly with a meaning than another expression does, and in doing this it would be necessary also to decide whether correspondence with a meaning involved correspondence with, or some relation to, a fact or a proposition. Only then could one decide with what analysis is fundamentally concerned, even if the question what analysis is fundamentally concerned with is not, as I suspect it is, an obscure way of asking for the analysis of analysis.

This is obviously not the place to analyse analysis; for, as has just been said, in the method here adopted an analysing expression is to be defined as an expression which both has the same meaning as a certain other and has the further character of corresponding more exactly with that meaning. Consequently neither of the two characters which an analysing expression must have is likely to be analysable in a way which would not involve the analysis of meaning. The analysis of meaning must either precede or accompany, and can not follow, the analysis of analysis, unless there is a radical mistake in the preliminary definition of analysis which I have suggested.

## 2. Type and token.

I shall generally avoid the word sentence, partly because



what I have to say applies to some things which are not sentences, and partly because it does not apply to all sentences. Roughly, I am concerned with all combinations of objects which are used to make statements. Thus what I have to say applies both to some combinations of non-verbal symbols, such as those used in mathematics and logic, and to other sets of objects used according to a prearranged code, such as the glass on the dish used by Wisdom's gangster to show that he has killed Al Capone (logical constructions I, Mind April 1931 p. 206); these combinations would not usually be called sentences. On the other hand some sentences are questions requests or commands, and to these what I am saying will not apply. I propose to call sentences which are not questions requests or commands or nonsense, and all combinations of objects which are used in the same way as these sentences, propositional signs. One may define a propositional sign as any recurrent combination of objects used with that sort of meaning which belongs to statements. It then becomes clear that the analysis of propositional signs of the form p is a propositional sign is part of the analysis of meaning.

I called propositional signs recurrent combinations because sentences are, roughly, recurrent combinations. In the ordinary sense of sentence, a single sentence may be spoken written and heard any number of times, and we may say of a number of separate events or states of affairs that they are all the same sentence. I propose to use the phrase propositional sign in a similar way;



I shall say of different events or states of affairs that they are the same propositional sign, and each of the separate instances I shall call a propositional token (the terminology here used is taken from C. S. Peirce and explained by F. P. Ramsey, foundations of mathematics p. 274); propositional tokens which, in the sense explained, are the same propositional sign will be called tokens of the same type. Elements or parts of propositional signs will be called propositional units, or units simply, and individual instances of these elements will be called unit tokens. Propositional units may be words or combinations of words, and may be such things as a glass resting on a plate, as in Wisdom's example.

### 3. Definition.

I propose to analyse mean as it occurs in four different sorts of definition. These four different sorts are given us by a cross-classification. First one may divide definitions into those in which a propositional sign and those in which a propositional unit is defined, which one may call propositional and unit definitions. Secondly one may divide them into those in which the definition is by means of another expression and those in which it is by means of an object or proposition; these may be called substitutive and objective definitions. The substitutive propositional definition will be called sentential; the



objective propositional will be referential; the substitutive unit definition will be connotational; and the objective unit definition denotational. The four examples in my first section were a connotational definition, a denotational, a sentential, and a referential, in that order. Other examples are: sentential, /John and James are brothers means John and James are male and had at least one common parent/; referential, /the president is dead (for example, in a newspaper) means that Hindenburg is dead - I might say this to someone who thought it was Roosevelt - or /Hindenburg is dead means that Hindenburg is dead - as one might say in a logical discussion; connotational, /Le roi means the king/; denotational, /the victor of Austerlitz means Napoleon/. In the first and third examples we may substitute means what is meant by for means, and the two italicised expressions may be put in either order; this is why they are called substitutive definitions. A substitutive definition can always be turned into an objective definition; we do away with the italics of the defining expression, and insert that after means if the definition is propositional. On the other hand, whether an objective definition can be made substitutive is a matter of chance. The two sorts of substitutive definition can be defined in terms of the two sorts of objective definition, in this way; if a means b, in the substitutive sense of mean, then what a means in the objective sense is identical with what b means in the objective sense. So my principal need is to analyse the objective sense, or rather



the two objective senses, of mean. The definitions of the two substitutive senses may then be given a rather less cryptic form.

Quite apart from the dependence which I have just pointed out of the substitutive senses on the objective senses, it is, I think, natural to expect the objective senses to be of more philosophical interest than the others, because they give the relation of language to the world, or to facts, while the substitutive senses merely give relations internal to language.

#### 4. Method: propositional signs as pictures.

The analysis of meaning which I shall try to give is based on the view of language expressed by Wittgenstein in the words 'the proposition is a picture of reality' (tractatus logico-philosophicus 4.01). He also says (2.15) 'that the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way represents that the things are so combined with one another'. There are obvious considerations in favour of this general point of view. In most languages the method of saying whatever has to be said is determined, within certain limits, by the vocabulary, which links words and phrases with objects, and the rules of syntax, which link the combining of words with the combining of objects; often, of course, the vocabulary and syntax allow alternatives, but the number of alternatives is limited. To any difference



in what has to be said a difference of vocabulary or of syntax or both corresponds. A good deal of Russell's logical work has been directed to showing that grammatical form is not a guide to the form of facts. One can now see that it is a very imperfect guide, yet it can not be denied that there is some formal correspondence between language and what it expresses, and that nearly all linguistic propositional signs display it in some degree.

On the other hand, quite apart from the logical defects of language as an analysing agent, to conceive language as a picture or formal counterpart of what it expresses is not a sufficient explanation of the connexion. It is possible to tell what a picture in the ordinary sense represents by simple inspection of it. But it is rarely possible to tell, from simple attention to a spoken written or arranged sign, what it represents; or rather it is impossible to tell from unsophisticated attention. What the sign represents can only be perceived by a person who is sophisticated in the sense that he knows how it is being used. We know, from the fact that there are different languages, that different signs can represent the same objects and combinations; and from the possibility of ambiguity, that the same sign can represent different objects and combinations. We may say roughly that it is possible for any sign to represent anything.—I think something of this sort has been said by Wittgenstein in discussions—though there are differences of convenience and practical limits.



Thus it is correct to call propositional signs pictures or formal counterparts only because if someone knows how their units are being used and how the placing or arranging of the units is being used, he knows what they represent; and not because they resemble what they represent in the direct way in which a picture or model (Wittgenstein's word, 2.12) resembles what is depicted or copied. Wisdom, in discussing Wittgenstein (Logical constructions I, Mind April 1931 p. 202), goes further; he says 'hardly any, if any, sentences in any ordinary language do picture facts . . . . he is trying to point out an ideal to which some sentences try to attain': but I think this is too far.

What is required, then, for an analysis of meaning in the denotational sense ( § 3 ) is the discovery of what is meant by saying that a propositional unit is linked by usage with some object, or is used to stand for some object; and for the analysis of meaning in the referential sense, what is meant by saying that the combining of certain units in a propositional sign is linked by usage with the combining of certain objects.

It is sometimes assumed, I think, that the usage factor in meaning, just referred to, must be a mental factor; that is, that it must have some relation to mental happenings consisting of people consciously attaching a sense to a sign or unit. If this assumption were true, the analysis of meaning in the denotational sense - to take the simpler case - would be on these lines; denotational definitions would mean that most people who have used



a certain propositional unit have attached a certain sense to it, or perhaps have used it to stand for a certain object. Such an analysis would not amount to much until one had amplified it by analysing attaching a sense, or using a unit to stand for an object; this factor would, of course, have to be analysed in terms of some conscious mental process. I suspect, though I am not certain, that if it were true that a mental factor of this sort was involved in the analysis of meaning, it would turn out that this mental factor was still in need of psychological and experimental investigation, so that we should not yet be in a position to carry the analysis any further; we should have to wait until we could analyse the descriptions of this mental factor put forward by psychologists. But this is only a conjecture. In any case I doubt whether the usage factor in meaning is a mental factor, and will try to say why.

It is well known that children all learn some language, having previously known none, and that people living among foreigners with whom they have no language in common can none the less pick up the language spoken by the people round them. It is clear that when a language is learnt in this way the process of learning must be based in some way on observation of the linking of propositional units with objects and of combinations of them with combinations of objects. It is clear that mental processes of attaching a sense to a sign are not observed. What is observed consists, roughly, of the uttering of certain sounds, most of which are of



a general nature which recurs a number of times, and the occurring of certain other happenings or states of affairs in certain spatio-temporal relations to these sounds. It seems to me that it may be possible to analyse meaning simply in terms of the sort of phenomena which would be observed by someone picking up a language.

The argument from picking up a language is not a conclusive proof that meaning can be analysed in terms of non-mental phenomena. The argument would be that, since people sometimes know what the propositional signs belonging to a certain language mean when they have made sufficient observations of the spatiotemporal relations and other observable relations between the signs and other objects, what they are knowing about meaning simply consists of the facts that the observable relations have occurred; and therefore all facts to the effect that some propositional sign or unit has <sup>a</sup> certain meaning are simply constituted by the holding of observable relations between expressions and other objects. This is the assumption which I am in fact adopting. But the alleged facts about picking up a language would be capable of another interpretation: that the occurrence of the observable relations between signs and other objects to which I have referred, or the observation of them, causes the supposed learners to infer that the users of the signs are attaching certain senses to them, and that what the learners are knowing when they know that the propositional signs and units have certain meanings consists of facts partly constituted by mental factors, namely the attaching of



senses; there might or might not be the attaching of a sense by the learners as an intermediate causal stage.

I therefore do not venture to say for certain that meaning can be analysed without reference to any mental factor; I think it is clear that the analysis can go some distance, but possibly mental factors have to be brought in to complete it. But if mental factors are involved, the argument from picking up a language shows that whenever a propositional sign or unit has a certain meaning it must always stand in certain observable relations to objects from which it would be logically possible to infer the mental factor. There would be a systematic correspondence between these observable relations and the mental factors; so that if the observable relations could be traced, if they did not form part of the analysis of meaning, they would, all the same, show the pattern or structure of the mental factors which did form part of the analysis.

Thus we may reasonably expect observable relations between propositional signs and units, and objects and their combinations, to take us some distance in the direction of seeing how signs and objects are linked by usage.

## 5. Speakers and reporters.

If meaning can be analysed on the lines suggested, so that the relation between a propositional sign and its meaning is seen



to be comparable up to a point with that between a picture and what it represents, provided its units and their arrangement are properly linked by usage with objects and their combinations, then it will be clear that the relations which constitute the meaning of language are simply a special and somewhat subtle case of the ordinary uniformities which are observable throughout the whole <sup>of</sup> nature. This, which seems to me the most fruitful way of regarding language, ~~is~~ has been very clearly expressed by L. J. Russell (proc. arist. soc. sup. vol. XIII, 1934, p. 177): 'any public performance . . . . can be called a "report" . A "report" is relative to a "reporter", which may be a machine, or a plant, or an animal, or a person, etc. An acid turns blue litmus paper red. "Turning red" is the report made by litmus paper in the presence of an acid. A weight of 1 lb. put on the scale of a good balance makes the finger of the balance turn to the mark "1 lb." The taking up of this position by the finger is the "report" of the balance when 1 lb. is on its scale'. One can see that the difference between Russell's litmus and pound weight and a person writing or talking English is one of degree. Imagine a parrot which has a vocabulary consisting of the words John and Mary; suppose it says John only when John comes into the room and Mary only when Mary comes into the room; it would perhaps be a stage nearer to the adult human degree of sophistication than the litmus paper, though it would not have attained syntax. The next stage would perhaps be found in the early utterances of



an infant, when rudimentary syntax begins to operate: and so on. The link between the turning red of the paper and the acid, the link between the saying of John and the entry of John, can certainly, and the link between an infant's early remarks and objects they represent can probably, be analysed wholly in terms of observable factors. When one considers the matter in this way it seems natural to expect that the links which constitute the meaning of language in its sophisticated uses can also be so analysed.

#### 6. Events, modes, facts, elements, objects.

It is agreed that there are certain objects or complexes whose relation to propositional signs constitutes the meaning of those signs. But there are various different designations for these objects or complexes, of which fact is perhaps at present the favourite. Wisdom in logical constructions and in is analysis a useful method in philosophy? (proc. arist. soc. sup. vol. XIII, 1934) bases his discussion of analysis on the relations between sentences and facts; Wisdom begins by discussing the facts which ordinary sentences in the ordinary sense express, and ends by distinguishing different types or orders of facts, the existence of some of which he claims to be analysable in terms of the existence of others. The reference to facts is very convenient, for two reasons; first, according to the ordinary colloquial use of the word fact, to which Wisdom carefully confines himself as



far as possible, to every true sentence or true use of a sentence there corresponds one and only one fact, which it is natural to call the fact expressed by that sentence. To some sentences different facts correspond according to the circumstances of their use - these are chiefly those which contain~~4~~ personal or demonstrative pronouns, <sup>sometimes the definite article</sup> and here, then, now, and so on - but there is no great difference of principle. Thus when an analysis is sought a sentence is put forward for consideration, and provided the sentence, or the use of it which is in question, is true, it is certain that one and only one fact is being investigated. All sentences with the same meaning express the same fact, if they express any, and all sentences expressing the same fact have the same meaning. Thus the product of analysis is a new sentence expressing the same fact as the sentence first considered, and with the same meaning, but expressing that fact or that meaning more analytically. Secondly, a point which follows from the first, a fact may have any degree or kind of particularity or generality, determinateness or indeterminateness, and so on, in exact correspondence with these characters as they belong to sentences or their meanings.

Wisdom's logical work~~4~~ is based on the variable nature of facts, as I have just described it. This is not necessarily a defect, for I do not think it can be questioned that the word fact actually is used in such a way that my description is true. But this use of fact is analytically imperfect, and is recognised



to be so by Wisdom. Accordingly he gives an analysis of generality which is roughly to the effect that the existence of general facts is to be analysed in terms of the existence of non-general facts and of general sentences which incompletely express them (this is my approximate way of putting it; Wisdom's statements are in logical construction V, Mind April 1933 p. 192, and is analysis a useful method in philosophy? pp. 72-3). He thus concludes, to use for the moment a terminology which I should agree with him in finding unsatisfactory, that non-general facts are more fundamental than general facts. This is the type of solution for the question of generality to which I think one naturally comes if one considers mainly relations between propositional signs and facts, and I am not certain that it is not correct. I think, however, that this type of solution seems less obviously correct if one considers propositional signs otherwise than in relation to facts.

It is the peculiarity, and up to a point the convenience, of facts, that the sentences, for instance, Scott wrote Marmion and the author of Waverley wrote Marmion express two different facts - difference of meaning, difference of fact, is the rule. This is puzzling, if one reflects that both the sentences and both the facts relate to one single set of happenings, the writing of a particular book by a particular person, and if one allows one's mind to dwell too much on the conception of facts as what the world really consists of; not, of course, that one has any right



to be puzzled. I propose to consider propositional signs, not in their relation to facts, but in their relation to the happenings to which I have just vaguely said that the two sentences and the two facts relate. For these objects, which it would not always be correct to call happenings, I shall use a special word, borrowed from Wisdom. The word event has often been used by philosophers in recent years, whether in accordance with colloquial usage I am not sure, to mean something which is not a continuant, but differs from it in that, while a continuant lasts for a certain time and passes through certain changes, what is called an event occupies a time and contains changes. Wisdom (logical constructions II, Mind Oct. 1931 pp. 462-5) points out that it is incorrect to call anything an event if it does not contain a change, and suggests the use of another word, mode. I propose to adopt this word, and shall use it, as I think Wisdom did, to mean something which either is an event in the sense just pointed out, or differs from an event only in that it contains no change (this is a denotational definition). Wisdom's example of a mode of the latter sort is the persistence during a certain time of a certain colour unchanged throughout a certain area. Scott's writing of Warrion was either an event (if he wrote it at a sitting), or a set of separate events, (if he wrote it at several sittings), and accordingly either a mode or a set of separate modes.

Consider a comparatively simple mode, consisting for instance of my pen falling to the floor. We may say that the propositional



sign my pen has fallen on the floor means that this mode has occurred; this is a referential definition. Now just as facts are commonly spoken of as made up of certain elements, modes also can be divided into elements. But this division can be made in any number of different ways. One may say, for instance, that the elements of the mode in my example are my pen, the process of falling on something, and the floor; or that they are the falling of my pen and the resting of my pen on the floor; and so on. About each set of elements one mentions one may add and these are all the elements. Thus a statement that certain objects are the elements of a certain mode is not necessarily incompatible with a statement that certain other objects are its elements. The division into elements is in a way arbitrary. But not wholly; if one selects some elements from one set and some from another, it may turn out that together they make up the mode, or it may not. For example it will not do to include the falling of my pen (an event), and the process of falling (a character involved by that event), in the same set. When two elements can be included in the same set we may say that they are coordinate elements; and when two or more elements are a complete set, that is, together make up the mode in question, we may say that they are complementary elements.

I think these remarks show more or less how I use the word element, although I am not able to give a connotational definition. It is sometimes convenient to use the word object. An object,

as I use the word, is anything that can be an element of a mode, and also anything that can be an element of a fact. Thus my use of the word is completely general. It may occasionally be convenient to speak of non-existent objects, for instance to call unicorns objects; but this need does not often arise, and no harm will be done if it is not borne in mind. These uses of the words element and object occasionally cause misunderstanding; this is generally because it is supposed that to call something an element or an object is to say something about its analysis, or to give some explanation of its nature. This is not so, for instance when, in universals and particulars (proc. arist. soc. 1933-4) I refer to a time as an element of a fact, I am not making any claim about the analysis of time. Element and object are quite non-committal. Here my use of element appears to differ from Wisdom's. He would, I think, distinguish elements of facts from parts and sections of facts (logical constructions III, Mind Oct. 1932 pp. 443-5); but his parts and sections would I think be elements in my sense.



## 7. Applicative regularity.

I can now begin to consider the analysis of meaning in the sense in which the meaning of a propositional unit is given by a denotational definition - it will be convenient to call meaning in this sense denotational meaning. Both here and in section 3 I am concerned with those senses of meaning in which we talk about the ordinary or accepted or correct meaning of an expression. Thus I am not concerned at present with the senses in which we can say that someone has used an expression with a certain meaning, or has attached a certain sense to it, on a certain occasion; though I may be concerned with the senses in which we can say that an expression is commonly used with a certain meaning. The type of analysis which I am trying to give is indicated in section 5: if one is hoping to find uniformities of connexion between the events which constitute propositional signs and other pieces of the world, one is obviously adopting a route which will lead first to ordinary uses and only subsequently to special uses.

It will be convenient to distinguish the sense of observe in which someone is only observing something if it is a factor in his experience at a particular time, from the sense, used already in my earlier sections, in which the recurrence of something at several times can be observed. I shall say that what is observed in the former sense is directly observed. I propose to examine the way in which a familiar expression, which might be used by anyone in giving an account of something he is directly observing,



is related to the observed object for which it stands; for example, the phrase or propositional unit the rain might be used in such propositional signs as the rain has stopped, the rain is getting heavier, the rain is turning into snow, and so on. What course should I take if a foreigner or a child asked me what the rain meant? I might point out of window and say /The rain means that/, or I might say /The rain means the water falling from the sky/, or /The rain means what you would feel if you went out of doors/. These would all be correct denotational definitions, though only the second is convertible, in the way described in section 3, into a connotational definition. In a denotational definition one may adopt any method one likes of bringing to the notice of one's hearer or reader the object meant; the definition may be, like my first, what Johnson called ostensive, or of any other sort. What link does this definition assert to exist between the propositional unit and the object pointed out or described?

The obvious answer is on the lines of saying that most people have used the rain to mean what is pointed out. But using something to mean something would still require analysis. Let us imagine, for the moment, that English is a very simple language used by a primitive tribe. This tribe only has names for a small number of objects, all of which are directly observable objects, and its language has no syntax of the ordinary sort. Any name, when uttered, means that the object named is present in the speaker's environment. The members of the tribe are so simple-



minded that whenever one of them observes an object for which he has a name he names it, and so observant that nothing escapes their notice. Now from the two premises that every namable object is always named and that the rain is used to mean rain it follows that every situation which has included among its elements a member of the tribe and rain has also included a unit token of the type the rain, and every situation which has included among its elements the propositional unit the rain and a member of the tribe has also included rain. This linking in use between a propositional unit and an object (such as the type of happening of which a shower is an instance) I call applicative regularity. In my imaginary example the unit the rain would have perfect applicative regularity; but of course all actual units will only have applicative regularity in some very imperfect degree. If a unit really were used like the rain in my example I should say that it had aboriginal correlation with an object.

The sooner one can get away from these aboriginals the better. Is it possible to find true premises from which it would follow that some propositional unit really has some degree of applicative regularity? I think it can be done, or at any rate one can get somewhere near it. Suppose that for every propositional unit which is used to mean a directly observable object there have been more situations in which it has been used of which the object meant has also been an element than contrary situations, and that the rain is used to mean rain, it will follow that there have been



more situations in which <sup>has been used which have also included rain</sup> the rain <sub>h</sub> as an element than situations which have not. These premises are much nearer the truth than the previous pair, but they are still a good way from it, or at any rate from what one can know to be the truth. These premises might pass if units meaning directly observable objects were only used in the presence of those objects. But of course they are not. I am just as likely to say the rain was heavier that year than in any other I can remember, or the rain has been fatal to the crops in Asia Minor, as the rain is getting heavier, or any of those statements of direct observation. Consequently the situations in which both a unit token of the type the rain and rain have been elements are probably in a small minority among the situations in which the rain has been used.

But we can find a still less objectionable premise. Consider sentences in which the rain occurs which are only likely to be used to report actual observations of what is going on in the speaker's environment; for instance, the rain has stopped, or the rain is getting heavier. I want to use situation in such a sense that if rain has been falling and has just stopped one may speak of this situation as having rain as an element; that is, I treat a situation as a sort of expanded specious present. I fear the examples which lead me to write in this way are perhaps not very happy, but I have not been able to find others which both are more convenient and enable me to keep strictly to colloquial uses of language. Suppose the sentences I have just quoted have nearly



always been used by speakers to give an account of what is happening in their environments; and have nearly always been used truly. Then we may say that most situations which have included one of these propositional signs as an element have also included rain as an element. I can now further amend the pair of premises I have been considering. Suppose that, for every propositional unit which is used to mean a directly observable object, there are at least two propositional signs, of which it is an element, of which each has been used in more situations of which the object meant by the unit has also been an element than situations of which it has not, and that the rain has been used to mean rain, it follows that for the rain there is at least one propositional sign of the sort described in the premise. The supposition here made is not extravagant - one could argue for its truth even if it is not true or not precisely true. The suggestion I want to make is that perhaps the conclusion here drawn would follow, not merely from the double premise, of which the first half is specially designed to meet the case, but from the single premise that the rain has been used to mean rain. For if this were so, then the analysis of meaning in the denotational sense would include or consist of something like the first clause of my double premise.

The assumption that when a propositional unit means some directly observable object, like rain, there always are propositional signs containing it the utterance of which has generally been



accompanied by the object meant, is fairly plausible. It is quite plausible, for instance, to suggest that situations which have included the rain has stopped as an element have generally also included rain as an element. It is necessary to suppose that for each propositional unit there are at least two propositional signs satisfying the required condition, for if there were only one the accompanying of it by certain objects could not constitute the meaning of one of the units making it up rather than another. Thus if it happened that situations in which the rain has stopped was uttered always included rain, this fact alone would not suffice to give a correlation between the rain and rain rather than between the rain and stoppage, or has stopped and rain. But if we consider the situations which contain as elements other propositional signs in which the rain occurs, such as the rain is getting heavier, and other propositional signs in which has stopped occurs, such as the shouting has stopped, and so on, we find a correlation between the rain and rain, and between has stopped and stoppage, but not between the rain and stoppage or has stopped and rain.

I think the suggestion I am making can now be put fairly clearly. If a given propositional unit is part of at least two different propositional signs each of which has been an element of at least one situation of which a certain object has also been an element, I shall say that the unit in question has some degree of applicative regularity, and has some degree of applicative correlation with the object in question. If the favourable sit-



uations, that is, those which include the correlated object, outnumber the unfavourable, I shall say that the propositional unit has a high degree of applicative regularity and correlation. Then my suggestion is that the meaning of a propositional unit, and the link between it and the object it means, is constituted by its having a high degree of applicative correlation with that object. Caution is necessary in putting forward an analysis of the denotational sense of meaning in these terms. For applicative correlation in the sense defined can only hold between propositional units and directly observable objects. Thus the meaning of such a word as ethnology, or statistics (not meaning columns of figures), which do not mean directly observable objects, can not be constituted by their applicative regularity<sup>in this sense</sup>. To allow for unobservable objects there are two courses one can take: one can say that when units are said to mean unobservable objects mean is used in a different sense from when units are said to mean directly observable objects; or one can say that meaning is to be analysed alternatively. If one gives an alternative analysis it will be thus: whatever x and a may be,  $\sqrt{x}$  means a, in the denotational sense  $\sqrt{x}$  means in the referential sense that either x has a high degree of applicative correlation with a, or x is linked with a in the way in which units are linked with unobservable objects which they mean; in this referential definition, the second alternative in the analysis has, of course, still to be filled in. If the supposition that meaning has two separate denotational



senses, one for directly observable and the other for unobservable objects, is preferred, in the above analysis for that either . . . . . or read either that . . . . . or that.

This analysis of the meaning of propositional units which mean directly observable objects is based on two assumptions to which exception may be taken; first, that people more often than not speak the truth, at any rate in reporting their observations, and second, that all such units are commonly used actually in the presence of the objects they mean. Each of these assumptions may be objected to on two grounds; first, that it is false, and second, that even if it is true its falsity would be compatible with directly observable objects being meant by propositional units: the second is the serious objection. I think that in point of fact the two assumptions are true: even if people do not usually speak the truth, they are rarely, I think, tempted to deceive about what they are directly observing; and it is very hard to think of a name of any directly observable object which people would not naturally use in phrases like that table, that thunder, and so on. These are the obvious considerations. But if I can show that the falsity of the assumptions is probably or certainly incompatible with directly observable objects being meant by propositional units, since some units do mean directly observable objects it will follow that the assumptions are probably or certainly true.

I can only offer some very general remarks on this point. If meaning is to be constituted by applicative regularity, the



degree of regularity must be pretty high; if a low degree were allowed, my analysis would often compel us to say that a unit meant some object which in fact it does not mean. If truth speaking about directly observed objects were not fairly common, the satisfying of this condition, high applicative regularity, could not be guaranteed. The question is, does the fact that some units mean directly observable objects really entail that, at any rate in their accounts of what they are directly observing, people generally speak the truth? It seems to me that it probably does, on these grounds: people who are picking up a language (in the way described in section 4) are, among other things, discovering the meaning of propositional units; as I have said in section 4 on this point, I am assuming that the meaning of propositional units is constituted by observable relations between them and other objects, and if this is so what the people mentioned are discovering consists of these observable relations; but unless a certain amount of statements are true there will be no observable relations sufficient to distinguish the object meant by some unit from other objects; thus the fact that some units mean objects (whether directly observable or not), in other words, that units have denotational meaning, entails that amount of truth speaking which is necessary for the occurrence of applicative regularity. Similarly one may ask whether the fact that some units mean directly observable objects really entails that these units are often used in the presence of the objects meant. It may be contended that



it is logically possible, even if it rarely or never happens, for a word or phrase to mean some directly observable object and yet not be used in its presence. Here again I think the argument from picking up a language holds; on the lines that a correlation between an object and one unit rather than another could not be observed unless the unit and the object sometimes accompanied one another. But I think it must be admitted that it is logically possible for an expression meaning a directly observable object never to be used in the presence of the object meant. I should maintain, however, that if this ever occurred the use of the expression would have to be based on units having applicative regularity, in the sense that most people would know how it was to be defined in terms of such units.

I am aware that I am only in a position to give a very sketchy defence of the proposed analysis of denotational meaning. It seems to me that the general type of analysis adopted is probably right; but I think there are two difficulties in the way of the presentation of it: first, that the precise analysis I have given may have the wrong form, even if it is on the right lines, and second, that the clearing up of denotational meaning is partly dependent on the clearing up of meaning in other senses.

Note 2. On these lines, the analysis of meaning in the connotational sense (§3) would be: for all values of  $\underline{a}$  and  $\underline{b}$ , [ $\underline{a}$  means  $\underline{b}$ , and  $\underline{a}$  and  $\underline{b}$  have applicative regularity] means that the object with which  $\underline{a}$  has applicative correlation is the object with which  $\underline{b}$  has applicative correlation. This analysis, of course, does not allow for the difficult case of words with more than one sense.



### 8. Structure and form.

A start has now been made towards the analysis of denotational meaning, and thereby of unit meaning in general. The next question to be considered is how the groupings of units in propositional signs are significant. I now have to follow up the suggestion from Wittgenstein which is stated in section 4; 'the proposition is a picture of reality'. He also says (2.15) 'that the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. This connexion of the elements of the picture is called its structure'; (4.1211) 'a proposition f a shows that in its sense the object a occurs, two propositions f a and g a that they are both about the same object'. The significance of the groupings of propositional units is to be explained somehow or other in terms of a community of structure between propositional signs and what they represent.

A simple illustration of the type of relation that is called identity of structure is given by the relation between a map and the country mapped, or between a mirror image and the scene it reflects. These illustrations are used by Wisdom, who remarks (logical constructions I, Mind April 1931 p. 205) 'a sentence is not identical in structure with the fact it expresses in the sense in which a reflexion, a picture, a diagram or a map is identical in structure with what it reflects, pictures, represents, or maps. A paragraph or account of a state of affairs is identical in



structure in this sense with the state of affairs of which it is an account. A sentence is not like a map, but like one of the facts which make up a map, such as that this dot is above that. This fact is of the same form as the fact about the inter-relationship of two towns which it is used to represent'; and 'even the best sentences are identical in form with a fact in only a rather unexciting way - not like a map and a country. A sentence is identical in form with a fact if and only if they contain the same number of elements'. Wisdom appears to distinguish between the structure of a set of sentences and the form of a single sentence. I shall consider structure first.

The sense in which a map and a country or a reflexion and a scene may be identical in structure is discussed by Wisdom in a note on identity of structure (Mind, April 1931). He distinguishes between systems constituted by the holding between various sets of terms of a single relation, which he calls plain systems, and systems constituted by the holding between various sets of terms of various relations each of which is a determinate of a certain determinable. To the latter type he gives no name, and I propose to call them crossing systems. He points out that maps and reflexions are crossing systems, and I think it is clear also that if a language or the set of objects that make up its meaning is a system it must be a crossing system. I shall only be concerned with crossing systems, and shall therefore use the word system by itself to mean crossing system.



Wisdom in his note first defines identity of structure in a sense in which it holds between two crossing systems when each element of one is linked with one element of the other by some material relation, such as the relation meant by is used as a symbol for. His definition is as follows: 'let  $R$  and  $R'$  be the determinables of the components of  $S$  and  $S'$  respectively. Let  $P$  be a one-one relation whose domain is the constituents of  $S$  and whose converse domain is the constituents of  $S'$ . Let each determinate,  $e$ , of  $R$  be such that there is just one determinate,  $e'$ , of  $R'$  such that if two constituents of  $S$  are related by  $e$  then their correlates (with respect to  $P$ ) in  $S'$  are related by  $e'$  and vice versa'. He then tries to adapt this definition so as to define  $P$  in extensional terms, with a view to giving a sense in which identity of structure may hold between two systems whose elements are not linked by any material relation. He does so in this way: 'where  $R$  is the relation determinates of which are components of  $S$  and  $R'$  the relation determinates of which are components of  $S'$ , each determinate,  $e$ , of  $R$  is such that there is a determinate,  $e'$ , of  $R'$ , such that for every occurrence of  $e$  in  $S$  there is an occurrence of  $e'$  in  $S'$ , and if in any two occurrences of  $e$  in  $S$  the referent (or relatum) is the same then there are two occurrences of  $e'$  in  $S'$  in which the referent (or relatum) is the same'. This definition seems to be imperfect in two ways, ambiguity and incompleteness. First, Wisdom's expression 'the referent (or relatum)' is ambiguous; it is necessary to interpret



the last statement (from 'and if') as meaning that if of any two occurrences of  $e$  in  $S$  the referent in one is the same as the referent in the other, there are two occurrences of  $e'$  in  $S'$  of which the referent in one is the same as the referent in the other, if the referent in one is the same as the relatum in the other, then in  $S'$  the referent in one is the same as the relatum in the other, and if the relatum is the same as the relatum, then in  $S'$  the relatum is the same as the relatum. Secondly, the definition is incomplete in two ways: it does not ensure that, if there are two relations in  $S$  each of which has two occurrences with a common term, then there shall be for each of them a different relation in  $S'$  which has two occurrences with a common term; and it does not ensure that a given term in  $S$  shall be correlated with one term and one only in  $S'$ , not merely when it occurs as a term of a single relation, but throughout the system -- a term may occur as a term of any number of relations. In addition to these two defects, Wisdom's definition is framed so as only to cover those systems which are constituted solely by two-termed relations. But it is possible to have systems constituted by relations of more than two terms, and to have relations whose numbers of terms are different among those which constitute a single system; systems of this last kind may be called compound systems. Compound systems may have the same structure just as much as simpler types: consider, for example, the relation between the series of letters A B B A A B B A C D E C D E and a sonnet whose rhyme scheme it symbolises; we



may say, roughly, that the holding of the two-termed relation, B following A, symbolises the fact that the first line does not rhyme with the second, the holding of the four termed relation, A having B and B between it and A, symbolises the fact that the first line does rhyme with the fourth, and so on.

I shall try to give in extensional terms a definition of identity of structure in the general sense in which it may hold between crossing systems whether or not they are compound - it is obvious, of course, that two systems with the same structure are either both compound or both not compound. As the definition is somewhat complicated it will be best to divide it into numbered clauses. A system S has the same structure as a system S' means that (1) the number of determinate relations occurring in S is the same as the number occurring in S'; (2) for every number,  $n$ , the number of relations occurring in S  $n$  times is the same as the number of relations occurring in S'  $n$  times; (3) for every term,  $x$ , in S, there must be some term,  $y$ , in S', such that the number of relations of which  $x$  is a term is the same as the number of relations of which  $y$  is a term, and whatever number  $n$  may be, for every different relation in which  $x$  occurs as a term  $n$  times there is a different relation in which  $y$  occurs as a term  $n$  times, and the place taken by  $y$  always corresponds with the place taken by  $x$ ; (4) if there are two or more terms in S related to one another, within S, as  $x$  and  $y$  in clause (3) are said to be related (that is, by the number of relations of which they are terms, by the



number of times they are terms, and the places they take), then there are the same number of terms in  $S'$  so related to one another and to the terms in question in  $S$ . The places which a term can take are, of course, first and second in a two-termed relation, first second and third in a three-termed relation, and so on.

Less need be said here about form. According to Wisdom's definition, quoted earlier in this section, a sentence is identical in form with a fact if and only if they contain the same number of elements. As a result of the correlation between facts and true sentences, pointed out in section 6, it might be claimed that every sentence which express a fact is identical in form with the fact it expresses, at any rate in a sense of form based on some sense or other of element - and in the later instalments of his logical constructions Wisdom approaches this way of speaking. If this were so, if it could be shown that a given sentence expressed some fact it would follow that they were in some sense of the same form. I think expressing can be analysed in terms of meaning, and meaning in its turn, up to a point at any rate, in terms of applicative regularity and identity of structure. I think the form of propositional signs, in the sense defined by Wisdom, is of importance, not for the analysis of meaning, but for the analysis of analysis; in analysing analysis it may be necessary to consider whether - in this unsatisfactory terminology - the number of elements in a propositional sign is the same as the number of fundamental elements in a fact; but this question does not arise if it is

merely meaning that is being analysed.



## 9. The meaning of propositional signs.

I shall now try to give a first sketch of an analysis of referential meaning. It is necessary to proceed in this way, step by step, for the reason which I have given in section 1, that an advance in the analysis of meaning depends upon an advance in the analysis of generality, which I have not so far touched. The analysis I can give at this stage will be limited to the meaning of propositional signs which are free from certain types of generality.

A propositional sign whose constituent units have applicative regularity may be involved in systems of various types. Consider, for example, the cat is on the mat. We may divide this propositional sign into three propositional units, the cat, is on, and the mat; it may be presumed that each of these has a high degree, of applicative correlation with a certain type of object, the second of them being correlated with an object of the type called a relation. Of course this account of the division of the propositional sign into units is very much simplified; one may hope to show ultimately how the sign can be divided into six units - words - each of which plays its part in a special way in giving the whole sign its significance. The account is also unsophisticated; it does not allow for the fact that when different situations contain an object of the type with which the cat is correlated they are containing either different continuants, or the same continuant on different occasions; but when different situations contain an



object of the type with which is on is correlated they are containing either different determinate relations of a particular determinable, or the same determinate relation. This fact would have to be allowed for if one were analysing cats and mats, or spatial relations, but need not, I think, be regarded at this stage when one is analysing meaning.

It will be convenient for me to use relation in the wide sense in which the terms of a relation are not necessarily objects of the same type; for I shall require to speak of the relation between a character (or, one might say, a characterising object) and a characterised object. Consider, for example, such propositional signs as the cat is asleep, or the rain has stopped. If we are going to say, as I shall presently, that in some system a token of the cat is asleep corresponds to some mode in another system consisting of a cat being asleep, it will be necessary to correlate the relation between the cat and the character of being asleep with the relation of succession between the two units, the cat and is asleep. Clearly it will also be necessary to give a sense in which this relation of succession has applicative regularity. This is easily done. It is not desirable to call the relation itself a propositional unit, as it is not separable from its terms in the way in which they are separable from one another. We may call it an order-factor. Then the order-factor has applicative correlation with the characterising relation, but in a slightly special sense of correlation. It has it if on most



occasions on which some propositional sign made up of only two units is used the object correlated with the second unit does in fact characterise the object correlated with the first. I am not, of course, proposing an analysis of the character of being asleep or having stopped; the special conventions just made are necessary if they are characters in some sense, as they clearly are (the analysis of stoppage, for instance, would probably be on these lines: there was rain at  $t^n$ , there was rain at  $t^{n+1}$ , there was no rain at  $t^{n+2}$ ).

I shall now try to describe two systems which will illustrate the structural relations between propositional signs and objects. Suppose some situation in which a cat is on a mat has contained certain other features. Suppose I am sitting on a sofa facing the fire, with a door behind me. A cat is asleep on the hearth-rug, a mouse has just emerged from its hole and is standing in the middle of the room behind the sofa. I am summing up the chances of the cat catching the mouse, and I use the following sentences: the cat is on the mat, the cat is asleep, the mouse is on the carpet, the mouse is frightened, the sofa is between the mouse and the cat (this explains why neither has yet seen the other), the mouse is between the sofa and the door. The six propositional tokens which I should use form a compound system; the sentences have been purposely chosen to give different numbers of terms. If one may for the moment treat sleep and fright as observable objects, then each of these sentences can be divided into proposi-



ional units which have applicative regularity. When one reaches the three-termed relation of being between it becomes necessary to say that a unit may include words which are not adjacent, but no new principle is involved. One may say that the propositional unit the cat has been used whenever anyone has uttered a propositional token of the <sup>linguistic</sup> form the cat - or - - the cat, and so on; similarly a certain propositional unit has been used whenever anyone has uttered a token of the form - is between - and -. Then there is another system consisting of six overlapping modes - overlapping in the sense that they have common parts - consisting of the cat on the mat, the mouse on the carpet, the sofa between the cat and the mouse, and so on. All the systems of the first sort, those which consist of propositional tokens used in some situation, having among them the cat is on the mat, together make up a system which I shall call the sign-system relative to the cat is on the mat; the contained system involved in a particular situation may be called a sign-set. Similarly all the systems of the second sort, those which consist of modes involved in a certain situation which include among themselves a cat on a mat, when the situation also includes the propositional sign the cat is on the mat, together make up a system which I shall call the situation-system relative to the cat is on the mat; any of the contained systems may be called a situation-set. Each sign-set and situation-set is, of course, a part of the sign-system or situation-system relative to each of the propositional signs contained in the



sign-set.

Sign-system and situation-systems have been defined in such a way that those relative to a given propositional sign necessarily have the same structure. They are defined by the selection, from all the occasions of the use of a propositional sign, of those occasions on which it is used truly, and in the presence of that mode on account of which it is true. I shall use these systems to give a highly simplified analysis of referential meaning, which may then be adapted and elaborated.

The simplified analysis is as follows: any propositional sign may be symbolised  $R(x' \dots x^n)$ , where the  $x$ 's stand for the units which make it up, of which there may be any number, and  $R(-)$  for the relation in which they stand to one another; then, whatever propositional sign  $R(x' \dots x^n)$  may be,  $\sqrt{R(x' \dots x^n)}$  means that  $x' \dots x^n$  are related by  $\sqrt{R}$  means that (1) every propositional unit it contains has a high degree of applicative correlation with one of the objects,  $x' \dots x^n$ , (2) the sign-system relative to it has the same structure as the situation-system relative to it, (3) the sign-system relative to any propositional sign,  $\underline{p}$ , contained in any sign-set relative to  $\sqrt{R(x' \dots x^n)}$  has the same structure as the situation-system relative to that propositional sign, and similarly the sign-system and situation-system relative to any sign,  $\underline{q}$ , related to  $\underline{p}$  as  $\underline{p}$  is to  $\sqrt{R(x' \dots x^n)}$ , have the same structure, and so on, for any  $\underline{r}$  so related to  $\underline{q}$ , and so on, for all signs indirectly related to  $\sqrt{R(x' \dots x^n)}$ , (4) every propositional unit



contained in any of the signs referred to in clause (3) has a high degree of applicative regularity.

This analysis is simplified in the following ways: (1) it is constructed in such a way that, if any propositional sign has a certain meaning in this sense, it will follow that on at least one occasion it has been used truly; (2) it is only applicable to propositional signs whose units are applicatively correlated with (that is, mean) directly observable objects. It is also puzzling in these ways: (3) the analysis is reflexive; it appears to apply to itself; (4) the analysis appears to be circular; it appears to analyse the meaning of a propositional sign in terms of the meaning of the sign itself - it might similarly be claimed that the analysis of denotational meaning analyses the meaning of a propositional unit in terms of the meaning of the unit itself; (5) the analysis suggests that the meaning of a propositional sign in some way involves the whole or a large part of the language or symbolic system to which the sign belongs.

Objection (1) I shall shortly try to correct: the correction of (2) depends upon the solution of some of the generality problems: (3) I shall discuss later: (4) may be dealt with straight away: (5) I think the meaning of a propositional sign, in the sort of sense in which we talk about its ordinary or accepted meaning, does involve the whole or a large part of the language to which the sign belongs; it involves the general syntactical scheme of the language, and this is, roughly speaking, a logical construction



from the structure of the total sign-system made up of all actual uses of the languages, in its relation to the structure of some total situation-system.

(4) Circularity of the analysis. The analysis interprets the referential meaning of a propositional sign in terms of the structure of the situation-system relative to it, and the situation-system relative to it is determined by the occurrence of modes or objects which make up the meaning of the sign. Thus the situation-system relative to the cat is on the mat is partly determined by the occurrence on certain occasions of cats on mats. None the less the analysis is not circular; because, first, when I say that /The cat is on the mat means that the cat is on the mat means that the units have applicative correlation, and so on, when the same words occur after means that as have occurred before it they are being used significantly, and their meaning is not being alluded to but used; and, second, it is a matter of chance whether, in a referential definition, words occur after means that which have also occurred in the defined expression. It happens to be convenient to use the same words or symbols. But I could have given the analysis in this sort of form: /The cat is on the mat means that that is on that means that the cat has applicative correlation with objects of the type of that - and so on. Similarly, in the analysis of denotational meaning, I could proceed by saying that /the cat means that means that the cat has a high degree of applicative correlation with the type of object to which that



belongs, and so on. In giving an objective (that is, a denotational or referential) definition one may use any expression one pleases which will serve to identify the object or mode which is meant, or which constitutes the meaning of the defined expression.

(1) and (2) Removal of simplification. Any propositional-sign which has a referential meaning in the defined sense must have been used truly on at least one occasion, for otherwise there would be no sign-system and situation-system relative to it. But we know that as a matter of fact a propositional sign may be an entirely new combination of units, or if not new may only have been used falsely - the great value of syntactical language being that it allows new types of statements with old materials. We may allow for new combinations by amending the analysis thus:  $\sqrt{R(x^1 \dots x^n)}$  means that  $R(x^1 \dots x^n)$  means that either  $R(x^1 \dots x^n)$  has the character defined in the simplified analysis, or each unit contained in it has a high degree of applicative correlation with one of the objects  $x^1 \dots x^n$ , and has been part of at least one propositional token of a type which has had the character defined.

Of course this is still much too simple, because of the restriction to propositional units correlated with directly observable objects. The propositional signs in a given language to which the analysis could be applied would make up within that language a sort of limited language of direct observation - it would be a logical construction from them, just as a language in the ordinary sense is a logical construction from all its propositional signs. The



analysis can, I think, be extended so as to cover objects which are observable, in the sense used in my earlier sections, but not directly observable. One could, I think, define a secondary sense of applicative regularity in terms of which one would define the sense in which expressions of spatial and temporal distance have meanings - such expressions as five minutes ago or a mile away. This would give a language of observation, going slightly beyond the language of direct observation. But the meaning of expressions displaying most types of generality would still be unexplained. But I think the analysis so far given has some sort of validity. There are three possible ways in which it may be utilised in a more advanced analysis: (1) it may be expanded and adapted, so as to give a single analysis of the meaning of all propositional signs; (2) it may form part of an analysis in alternative form, stating that a sign has a certain referential meaning if either it has the character given by the analysis in this section, or it has some other character, or one of several, appropriate to signs of greater generality; (3) we may conclude that there are several senses of referential meaning, and that the propositional signs of a language of observation have meaning in a special sense, and that this analysis, or roughly this, is the analysis of that sense.

Note 3. It is perhaps worth while to point out shortly here the importance of syntax and structure. Languages may be divided into unit languages, group languages, and structure languages.



Examples of a unit language would be the language of the parrot, imagined in section 5, whose vocabulary was John and Mary; and the primitive language described in section 7. A unit language would consist of indivisible propositional signs, each correlated with a single type of mode. The modes might have a highly complex structure, but the signs would have no structure. A group language has not so far been illustrated; it is the highest form of language the meaning of whose signs could be analysed without reference to identity of structure. It would include names for types of characterising object and types of characterised object, and could also include names for symmetrical relations. Instances of propositional signs which might occur in such a language are the cat is asleep, John and George are brothers. But there would be no rule fixing the order of the propositional units; one would be allowed to say indifferently is asleep the cat, and the reverse, are brothers and John George, and so on. A group language would have rudimentary syntax, but the syntax would only rule that the names of the objects linked in a fact must be spoken adjacently, or so as to make a single sound, whereas proper syntax fixes the order of the units as well as the collocation of them. The propositional signs of a group language would, of course have identity of form, in the sense given by Wisdom as quoted in section 8, with the facts they expressed; but there would be no identity of structure between sign-systems and situation-systems. A group language would be able to make new statements for a certain time, but their number

would be limited by the possible combinations of a certain number of propositional units in groups of not more than three, and the possible combinations would presumably in time be exhausted (they would be if in practice the speakers actually did make new statements). It would be to this extent richer than a unit language; but if it did not include indivisible propositional signs, as well as groups, it would also be very much poorer, since it would be logically possible to correlate a unit sign with a fact of any complexity; not so a group sign.

It is only possible to improve on a group language by having a language with genuine syntax, and this can only be secured by means of identity of structure between sign-systems and situation-systems. Structure languages are those whose propositional signs have meaning in a sense whose analysis involves this identity. Structure becomes necessary once one requires the power of expressing new types of fact involving unsymmetrical two-termed relations, or many-termed relations.



# 10. The types of generality.

It is now commonly recognised that all ordinary colloquial statements and propositional signs are in some way or other general; so, in consequence, are those the nature of whose meaning<sup>4</sup> I have so far been trying to analyse. From the use of the word fact pointed out in section 6, it follows that all the facts expressed by ordinary sentences are also general, in the sense appropriate to facts, and that the types of generality displayed by facts are parallel to the types displayed by sentences or propositional signs. It is also convenient to say that certain objects are general, but the generality of objects need not be considered here - in one sense every element of a general fact is a general object; but in another sense only some are; for some of the elements of some general facts are modes, and it is nonsense to call a mode general or non-general (it is absolutely determinate; thus one may say, in some sort of odd sense, that to call a mode non-general is helpful nonsense, to call it general is harmful nonsense). I consider that the generality of facts can be analysed in terms of the generality of propositional signs, just as I consider that the nature of facts (see note 4 below on the word nature) can be analysed in terms of relations

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<sup>4</sup> I apologise for the clumsy phrase the nature of whose meaning; but the need for it arises, not for the first time, from the ambiguity of analyse the meaning of. This may mean simply to analyse, or may mean to analyse meaning in the sense in which so and so has meaning. The difficulty is to tie it down to the second sense. It would be desirable never to say analyse the meaning of instead of analyse.



between propositional signs and modes.

It is easy to point out generality, though very difficult to analyse it. A propositional sign is general if there is more than one possible mode or situation or set of modes on account of which it would be true. Generality may conveniently be divided into various types, which I think clearly have in common the character which I have just stated: I do not know whether it is proper to call them species of a genus. I shall distinguish five types; the division adopted is convenient rather than systematic. They are as follows.

- (1) Hiaticion (which may also be called simple or open hiaticion).
- (2) Latent hiaticion.
- (3) Hypothesis.
- (4) Limited hiaticion.
- (5) Limited formal implication (or hypothesis).
- (6) Negation.

I shall say briefly what these six types are.

(1) The word hiatus is introduced by Wisdom (logical constructions III, Mind Oct. 1932 p. 452) to mean any word used in the same sort of way as something. His reason for choosing the word is obvious: something is not correlated with any object in the way in which, for instance, the cat is; if for the cat is on the mat one substitutes something is on the mat one leaves an object out of one's statement without putting anything else in its place. If one is speaking in terms of propositions or facts



one may say that a gap is left in the fact or the proposition, thus something in a propositional sign answers to a gap in what it expresses. I shall say that a propositional sign has hiation, or is hiative, if it contains some word like something, used as in something is on the mat, or some, used in a similar way. If two propositional signs differ only in that a hiatus in one takes the place of a name in the other, they will, of course, always express different facts. On the other hand, supposing on some occasion one person says something is on the mat, and another person, with better eyesight, adds the cat is on the mat, and the cat is on the mat, although they state different facts there is only one mode or account of which both statements are true - or, to put this more analytically, suppose a sense of situation-system has been defined for hiative signs, the mode corresponding to the token the cat is on the mat in the situation-system relative to its type will be the same as the mode corresponding to the token something is on the mat in the situation-system relative to its type. It is in the connexion with a single mode of propositional signs of different degrees of generality that I hope that part at any rate of the key to generality may be found.

(2) Latent hiation is the type of generality which is displayed by all or almost all ordinary sentences, even if they lack the other kinds. A propositional sign has latent hiation if it contains no hiatus but has the same meaning (in the substitutive sense) as some sign containing a hiatus; or in other words if it



means that something (not specified) has a certain character or stands in a certain relation. The propositional signs which I have considered in analysing meaning for a language of observation have all suffered from latent hiation, though some of them have perhaps not been general in any other way. Thus, the meaning of the cat is on the mat is something like this: there is some object which has the character of being a cat in some determinate form and there is some object which has the character of being a mat in some determinate form, and the first object is in some determinate position on the second, and there is no other cat or mat to which we are attending - something of that kind. Thus the cat is on the mat is full of concealed hiatuses, and I fear contains also concealed negation.

(3) The propositional signs which I call hypothetical are those which would often be called generalisations simply, or statistical or inductive generalisations; and various deductions from generalisations. Their meaning can sometimes be expressed in the form of a formal implication, but not all formal implications are hypothetical in the sense here required. A propositional sign displays hypothesis if it means that any object which has a certain character also has a certain other, and if further the first character is not one which is necessarily only possessed by objects limited to a certain number. Good illustrations of what I am calling hypothesis are given by Ramsey (on general propositions and causality, foundations of mathematics p. 237): arsenic is



poisonous, all men are mortal. These are hypothetical propositional signs, which Ramsey distinguishes from such a sign as Everyone in Cambridge voted. This belongs to type (5), which will shortly be dealt with. Commenting on the nature of propositional signs like arsenic is poisonous, which may be called hypothetical, Ramsey says 'it always goes beyond what we know or want', 'it expresses an inference we are at any time prepared to make, not a belief of the primary sort', which 'is a map of neighbouring space by which we steer'; 'if we professedly extend it to infinity, it is no longer a map; we cannot take it in or steer by it. Our journey is over before we need its remoter parts' (foundations, p.238). The special problem of this type of generality is stated very clearly by Ramsey in the paper from which I have quoted.

(4) and (5), limited hiation and limited formal implication, are easily pointed out, and their analysis does not, I think, offer so serious a problem as that of the unlimited types. Limited formal implication is illustrated by Ramsey's everyone in Cambridge voted. A propositional sign displays limited formal implication if it means that any object which has a certain character also has a certain other, and if further the first character is one which is necessarily only possessed by objects limited to a certain number. Thus the number of objects which can possess the character of being a person in Cambridge (at a particular time) is limited to the number of the population of Cambridge at that time. Limited hiation is very similar. Examples would be some of the people



at the meeting cheered, one of them burst into tears. A propositional sign displays limited hiation if it means that one or some of the objects possessing a certain character also possesses another, and if further the first character can only be possessed by a limited number of objects.

(6) Negation can be recognised without any special explanation.

It would be possible to point out in addition latent negation, and I think latent hypothesis. But I have confined myself to latent hiation because it is both the most easily detected and the most pervasive of the concealed types of generality.

There are two sorts of problems of analysis connected with generality. I claim so far to have analysed, up to a point, meaning in the sense in which propositional signs in a language of observation would have meaning. When one considers propositional signs which have generality of some type one may try to analyse the generality of those signs - asking such questions as, what is meant by propositional signs of the form p is general? this is the sort of problem of generality which is usually discussed. Or one may try to analyse meaning, in the sense in which general signs of some type have meaning. The problems are allied if, as I think is the case, analysing propositional signs of the form p is general involves showing what constitutes the meaning of p. The first sort of problem should properly be called the analysis of some type of generality, the second, the analysis of some type of meaning; to avoid confusion between the second analysis and

the analysis of a propositional sign, when this is called analysis  
of the sign, I sometimes say that the word analysis  
of the meaning is of the nature of meaning, not of meaning simply.  
For one type of meaning, then, the meaning of a language of observ-  
ation, the analysis of its nature has already been given up to a  
point. It remains, therefore, for me to analyse the generality  
of the various types of propositional sign which are general, and  
to analyse the nature of the meaning of those types of propositional  
sign which would not be found in a language of observation. I  
shall treat next hiation, open and latent.



## 11. Hiaticion.

Propositional units which have applicative regularity may for the moment be called names, though this is probably not the sense in which it will ultimately be convenient to use name. They will name the objects with which they are applicatively correlated. The character stated in the analysis of referential meaning given in section 9, may be called primary structural regularity; for the propositional signs which possess this character, that is, which have meanings in the sense there analysed, a shorter designation is needed, and they will be called naming signs. Those modes in a situation-system of which each corresponds structurally to some token of a given propositional sign may be called the correlative modes of that sign, and each will be the correlative mode of the token to which it corresponds.

I must now try to define a hiatus. A hiatus is a propositional unit like something, some, somebody. But one can not define it by saying that it is a propositional unit used in the same way as some or something; for such a definition would involve the meaning of something, in the sense that one could not understand it without knowing what something meant. But what has to be defined is the nature of the meaning of words like something. Nor can one define it by saying that it is a propositional unit which is not a name or part of a name or combination of names - although it is that - for then any unit not contained in a language



of observation would be a hiatus. It would be a little better to say that a unit is a hiatus if its replacement by a name usually or always results in a naming sign. But this would not distinguish between something and everything, nor allow for languages not based on languages of observation.

Ordinary language does not, of course, consist wholly of what are here called names and hiatuses. Hiatuses in propositional signs may be filling places which could be filled by names, or may be filling places which could be filled by some other type of unit. It is possible, therefore, that hiatuses can not be satisfactorily defined until the nature of the meaning of certain other types of unit has been analysed. I think, however, that I can give a definition which will serve for the moment. If one compares propositional signs containing hiatuses with propositional signs containing every or everything, it is clear that the former can be derived from naming signs in a much more simple way than the latter. If in a given use a given naming sign is true, it follows that a sign differing from it only by the substitution of a hiatus for a name will in the same circumstances be true also. Thus, if the cat is on the mat is true, then something is on the mat, the cat has some relation to the mat, the cat is on something, are also true; but everything is on the mat, and so on, are not. Something is on the mat is the sort of expression people use on entering a badly lit room and perceiving a black object, but not identifying it as the cat. Thus one may suppose that in circumstances in which



are  
cats/on mats such expressions as something is on the mat are more commonly used than such expressions as everything is on the mat. I propose, therefore, to say that a propositional unit is a hiatus if it satisfies these conditions: (1) it is not a name, has no parts which are names, and is not part of a name; (2) it has sometimes been used as part of propositional signs in which all the other units have been names, which would become naming signs if one of some set of names were substituted for it; (3) if such a propositional sign is used in a situation in which all the objects named by the names it contains are present, and if the placing of the objects corresponds to the placing of the names, then supposing a certain name were substituted for the unit (not a name) which is in question the propositional token which would result would be part of the sign-system relative to the type of which it would be a token, and the situation would contain a situation-set which would be part of the relative situation-system. I think these conditions serve to identify hiatuses for the moment, though I doubt whether they give a correct definition.

The sense in which placing is used above has not yet been explained.<sup>5</sup> Placing is easily pointed out by reference to identity of structure. Suppose that some token of the cat is on the mat is part of some sign-system, and a certain cat on a mat is part of a situation-system with the same structure. If in the situation-system instead of this cat being on the mat the mat were on the cat, while all the other parts of the system were unchanged, then the

<sup>5</sup> except by implication in § 8, pp. 35, 36.



identity of structure would be impaired; though if, of course, in all cases mats were on cats instead of cats on mats the identity of structure would be preserved (unless other characters of the cats were involved in the systems). If the systems have perfect identity of structure one may say that the placing of the cat and the mat correspond to the placing of the token units the cat and the mat; and that when two systems have the same structure every element of either system fixes the place of some element of the other is easy to see (though hard to analyse).

The analysis of open hiation is fairly simple. For all values of  $p$   $\overline{p}$  has open hiation means that  $p$  is made up of names and hiatuses; or if signs are to be included which are not derived from a language of observation simply by putting a hiatus in place of a name,  $\overline{p}$  has open hiation means that  $p$  contains at least one hiatus. But this is not a very valuable analysis, because of the imperfection of the definition of hiatus so far given. The analysis of latent hiation will also be impaired by this imperfection, but it will be much more valuable than the analysis of open hiation because it will contain the analysis of latency.

In order to analyse latency it will be necessary to consider substitutive definitions (see section 2). So far an approximate analysis has been given of the referential meaning of naming signs - this analysis has had the form of a referential definition of a referential definition. In terms of this analysis it will be possible to analyse sentential (that is, substitutive) definitions



of naming signs. The analysis is as follows: for all values of  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $\sqrt{p}$  means  $q$ , and  $p$  and  $q$  are naming signs means that  $p$  and  $q$  have primary <sup>structural</sup> regularity, and if  $p$  and  $q$  have relative sign-systems and situation-systems, then every correlative mode of  $p$  contains some element which is named by each of the names in  $q$ , and every correlative mode of  $q$  contains some element named by each of the names in  $p$ , and the placing of the names in each sign corresponds to the placing of the elements named in each correlative mode of the other sign. It would not be correct to say that each name in  $p$  names the same object as one name in  $q$  and one only. This condition would be satisfied by <sup>many</sup> naming signs with the same meaning, for example by the cat is asleep and le chat dort: but not by all, not, for example, by the sofa is to the left of the mat and the mat is to the right of the sofa; and when we come to signs which are not naming signs the corresponding condition is far more conspicuously not fulfilled, as, for instance, it is not fulfilled by John and George are brothers and John and George are male and have at least one parent in common. The sofa is to the left of the mat and the mat is to the right of the sofa set precisely the same limits to those modes which are to comply with the statement made, but they do so by means of different selections of elements, selections which are alternative to one another in the way pointed out in section 6.

Next it is necessary to define identity of meaning between a naming sign and a hiative sign (that is, a sign composed of names



and hiatuses) the type of identity of meaning, that is to say, which holds, for instance, between the cat is black and the cat is some shade of black. If in the latter sentence one substituted for some shade of a name for some shade of black the resulting sentence would again be a naming sign; or again, consider the cat is on the mat, the cat is in some position on the mat, the cat is in the middle of the mat. The first and second sentence are a naming sign and a hiative sign with the same meaning; the third sentence replaces the hiatus by a fresh name, thus making a more specific or less general sign, which has not got the same meaning as the first and second (strictly in the middle is not merely substituted for in some position, since in addition on is changed into of; a more correct illustration formally would be given by the cat is on the mat, the cat is on the mat in some position, the cat is on the mat in the middle). It will be convenient to have a special name for a propositional sign differing from a given hiative sign only in that it has a name in the place of each hiatus; I shall call it a closer of the hiative sign, because it closes the gaps. For a given closer we can very likely find some substitute with the same meaning which is again a hiative sign: this will be called an opener. For instance the closer given above, the cat is in the middle of the mat, is reopened by the cat is in some posture in the middle of the mat, and so on. Thus from any naming sign which has latent hiation a series can be generated by the relations of opening and closing, each closer making the



previous opener more specific; such a series may be called a closure series - it goes in the opposite direction to the omission series described by Wisdom (logical constructions III, Mind Oct. 1932 p. 454), and differs from it by filling all the gaps it creates.

The relation of closing is simply defined: for all values of  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $\sqrt{p}$  is a closer of  $q$  means that  $p$  is a naming sign and  $q$  is a hiative sign, and either  $q$  differs from  $p$  only in that in it a hiatus replaces one of the names in  $p$ , or some naming sign,  $r$ , can be found, such that  $p$  means  $r$ , and  $q$  differs from  $r$  only in that in it a hiatus replaces one of the names in  $r$ . It is the relation of opening which is crucial. For all values of  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $p$  is an opener of  $q$  if  $p$  and  $q$  have the same meaning,  $q$  is a naming sign, and  $p$  is a hiative sign containing one hiatus. This is the sense of having the same meaning which I shall now analyse. The analysis is as follows: for all values of  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $\sqrt{p}$  means  $q$ , and  $p$  is a hiative sign, and  $q$  is a naming sign means that (1)  $q$  has primary structural regularity, (2)  $p$  is made up of names and hiatuses, (3) any correlative mode of  $q$  would contain all the objects named by the names in  $p$  (and those would be all its elements in the sense pointed out in section 4, that is, they would make up the mode), (4) a propositional sign,  $r$ , can be found, which differs from  $p$  only in that in it every hiatus in  $p$  is  $r$  every name in  $q$  would name an element, and the placing of the elements would correspond to the placing of the names in  $q$ , and if any



correlative mode of  $q$  contained the elements named in  $r$  and not named in  $p$ , then the placing of the elements in that mode would correspond to the placing of the names in  $q$ . Definition of opener: for all values of  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $\overline{p}$  is an opener of  $q$  means that  $p$  is a hiative sign containing only one hiatus,  $q$  is a naming sign, and  $p$  means  $q$ . Analysis of latent hiation, for naming signs:  $\overline{p}$ , a naming sign, has latent hiation means that  $p$  is a naming sign, and some hiative sign  $q$  can be found such that  $p$  means  $q$  (or an opener of  $p$  can be found).

This analysis, I am sorry to say, is imperfect in two ways: it is impaired by the imperfect definition of hiatus, and it still contains a certain element of fiction. For it suggests that whenever a propositional sign, or at any rate a naming sign, has latent hiation, the means actually exist in ordinary language for generating a closure series from it, having as its last term a propositional sign free from hiation of any kind. But the analysis does not directly entail that the closure series can be carried on; it only entails that for any sign with latent hiation ordinary language provides an opener, and that if it provides a closer for the opener it also provides an opener for that, and so on. If the series had been carried a certain distance, a sign might be found which one felt certain still had latent hiation, without being able to see how to find an opener for it, or how to find one in ordinary language. On the other hand, as a rule the opener probably can be found, and the element of fiction is not very grave: if the



analysis required us always to be able to find a closer, it would be a very different matter. The sign which would be perfectly non-hiative is an ideal limit, and is not involved in the analysis of latent hiation.

## 12. Comparison of the present analysis with

### Wisdom's analysis of generality.

An analysis of generality is implied, though not stated very fully, in the last instalment of Wisdom's logical constructions (Mind April 1933. pp. 191-195). The analysis differs a good deal from the analysis of hiation given here; how far the difference is merely one of form I am not sure. Wisdom writes on page 192, 'if the fact that something is red is an incomplete fact, then "Something is red" incompletely locates a fact, and conversely. This is because The fact that Something is red is an incomplete fact just means "Something is red" is an incomplete sentence' (I think he should have added here and there is a fact which it locates, or some such clause). He adds in a footnote 'this is a theory of general facts'. Further on (p.193) 'it appears that we have not many species of fact but many uses of "fact". One of these uses, namely that applicable to atomic facts, is fundamental in the sense that all the other uses are secondary to it. To say of one use of a word that it is secondary to another means that the one is definable by means of the other, but it means more; namely that the less fundamental is not a determination or specification of the fundamental' (in the sense in which the meaning of horse in the sense of male horse is a determination of the meaning <sup>of</sup> horse in the sense of member of the horse species). 'What terminology does suggest is that there is one use of "fact" and that we have this and that species of fact, e.g. incomplete facts and complete



facts. What we want is one word such as "a fundamental" "a base" or "a fact" to be used in place of "fact" as used in "the fact that  $a R b$ " when  $a R b$  is atomic. Then confining ourselves to facts of the first level, we can say that our sentences express incomplete facts when they incompletely locate Facts. We say that our sentences express secondary facts, i.e. facts not of the first level, when they indirectly and not directly locate Facts'.

What exactly is Wisdom claiming? I think roughly this: there are certain facts, called atomic facts, which are absolutely determinate (in some sense the world is made up of all the atomic facts), and the sentences, if any, which express them must therefore be completely non-general; when the word fact is used otherwise than in reference to an atomic fact or conjunction of atomic facts, for example in /the cat is on the mat expresses a fact/, the sentence in which it occurs can be analysed in terms of atomic facts and a complex relation between atomic facts and some general sentence. The account of this complex relation is very elaborate, and can not be summarised. But we may conclude that Wisdom's analysis of the fact that  $a R b$  is a general fact would be something like this: /The sentence  $a R b$  has the complex relation in question to an atomic fact or conjunction of atomic facts/. There would be some difficulty, I think, in applying this analysis to a false general sentence, but I dare say it could be overcome.

My analysis of the generality of propositional signs with open or latent hiaticion has already been given. What would be my analysis



of the generality of the corresponding facts? I think as follows: for all values of  $R(x' \rightarrow x^n)$ , the fact that  $R(x' \rightarrow x^n)$  has open or latent hiation means that  $R(x' \rightarrow x^n)$  - that is, that  $R(x' \rightarrow x^n)$  is true, - and that  $R(x' \rightarrow x^n)$  (the propositional sign) has open or latent hiation in the sense appropriate to signs. Thus the two analyses appear to be inconsistent, for Wisdom's involves atomic facts and mine does not. But are they really inconsistent?

This depends, I think, on the definition of atomic fact. I should be inclined to say that facts can be analysed in terms of modes and signs, those facts, at least, that have any elements in any sense of element which are modes or elements of modes— Wisdom expresses a similar view in logical constructions II, pages 468-9 (Mind, Oct. 1931); I do not know whether he has changed his mind since then. The exact analysis would depend on the way in which fact occurred, but an example may be given; I should say, for instance, that the facts are as I have just stated means that for all values of  $p$ , if I have just said  $p$ , then  $p$  (that is,  $p$  is true), and I have just said something. The reference to modes would come in when the convention, used above, was analysed, that  $p$  symbolises a propositional sign. Supposing for the moment that atomic fact simply means non-conjunctive and absolutely determinate fact, then I think the analysis of there are atomic facts would be it is logically possible to find some  $p$ , such that  $p$  is true and it is not logically possible to find any opener for  $p$  (this secures absolute determinateness) and further it is not logically possible



to find any q, r, and so on, such that p means the conjunction of q, r, and so on (this secures non-conjunctiveness). I do not know whether Wisdom would accept such an analysis as this; but if he would he could, I think, analyse his complex relation between general sentences and atomic facts in terms of a different complex relation between the meanings of general sentences and the meanings of non-general sentences. This complex relation might be that from the general sentence it was logically possible to generate a closure series which would end in complete closure, that is which would have as its last term either a sentence with the character which p has in the above analysis of atomic facts, or a sentence having the same meaning as a conjunction of sentences with that character - that is, it would not be logically possible to find any opener for the last term. Such an analysis would not be much unlike the analysis of latent hiation which I have given. It would differ from my analysis by the reference to logical possibility, but exact by how much this difference amounts to I am not prepared to say.

If Wisdom would not admit an analysis of atomic in terms of modes and propositional signs, our analyses certainly must be in some degree inconsistent. The only ground I can think of on which he might object is that atomic facts are in some sense or other more fundamental than modes or than propositional signs - that is, that sentences containing atomic fact are more analytic. I doubt whether this is true. But I think his analysis might still be



consistent with mine, though it might not.

It might be held that the further analysis of the situation-system, in terms of which the meaning of naming signs was analysed, would involve reference to atomic facts which contributed to making up the systems. If that were so, atomic facts would also be involved in the analysis of latent hiation, and it might or might not turn out that my analysis was equivalent to Wisdom's, as applied to latent hiation. There are two ways in which analysis ~~of~~ of the nature of referential meaning might be held to involve reference to atomic facts, one tenable and one, I think, untenable. It might be held that the analysis of referential meaning involves the fact that there are atomic facts - that is, that there are non-conjunctive absolutely determinate facts. I think it is true that there are atomic facts in this sense, and that consequently this view of their connexion with meaning is tenable. Or it might be held that the analysis of referential meaning involves the fact that there are precisely those atomic facts, or those types of atomic facts, which as it happens do exist. This I think is not tenable, nor is a corresponding view of the connexion of atomic facts with generality tenable. For it seems to me clear that we both know the meanings of a number of propositional signs, and roughly what is meant by meaning, and know that all or most ordinary propositional signs are general, and roughly what is meant by general; and that on the other hand, though we may know that there must be atomic facts, we do not know what atomic facts there are, or what

types of atomic facts there are - although we may make guesses when we are considering facts about sense-data. I conclude that the analysis of meaning and the analysis of generality can not include the existence of the atomic facts, or types of atomic fact, which actually do exist.

About Wisdom's analysis I conclude that (1) if he would accept my sort of analysis of atomic fact his analysis is very likely equivalent to mine: if he would not, either (2) he would hold that the analysis of generality involves the existence but not the precise nature of atomic facts, in which case his analysis may be A. true and consistent with mine, B. true and inconsistent with mine, C. not wholly true but less or more approximately true than mine; or (3) he would hold that the analysis of generality involves the existence of precisely those atomic facts or types of atomic fact which do exist, in which case I think his analysis is wrong.



## 13 Hypothesis.

If one examines a propositional sign of the form [p means q], ~~where~~ and p is a hypothetical sign] there are three points in respect of which it may be analysed; an analysis may explain meaning, in the sense in which p has meaning, it may explain the generality of p, and it may explain the hypothetical nature of p. I think that in an exhaustive treatment of hypothesis it would probably have to be recognised that hypotheticals are of a great variety of types. I shall distinguish two types, which may be called generalisations and applications, corresponding roughly to what Ramsey (foundations of mathematics p. 240) called variable hypotheticals and ordinary hypotheticals. Instances of generalisations are all men are mortal, all tigers are dangerous, rain is wet; and of applications, if you go near that tiger he will attack you, if you go out you will get wet. Many attempts have been made, some obviously up to a point successful, to analyse generalisations and applications. It has been claimed, for instance, that all generalisations can be analysed in the form  $(x). \phi x \supset \psi x$ , or  $\sim: (\exists x): \phi x . \sim \psi x$ , so that all tigers are dangerous means (x). x is a tiger implies x is dangerous: similarly, that the analysis of applications must have the logical form  $p \supset q$ , so that

if you go out you will get wet means it is not the case  
both that you will go out and that you will not get wet.

I think that, as it happens, the first analysis is  
 clearly correct, as far as it goes, and the second clearly  
 wrong (Moore has often pointed out in discussion  
 that most propositions of the linguistic form if—then—  
 are clearly not of the logical form  $p \supset q$ : the quickest  
 way to see this is by reflecting that if I say to some-  
 one if you go out you will get wet, the corresponding  
 material implication must be true if he stays in or if  
 he gets wet without going out, both of which things may  
 happen when it is not raining and what has really been  
 said is false; moreover if he stays in—thus making true  
 the material implication—it is none the less relevant  
 to say afterwards if you had gone out you would have  
got wet).

I give these illustrations chiefly in order to  
 point out the senses of meaning which I want to consider,  
 the senses in which the word occurs in the above analyses,  
 or in the corresponding referential definitions. The  
 types of analysis to which I have just referred do not  
 directly help on this point; they are directed to show-  
 ing what may for the moment be called the logical form  
 of certain propositions, and they are in terms of meaning  
 in one of the senses in question.



I regret that I do not see at all clearly how meaning in these senses is to be analysed: but it is perhaps worth while to state certain aspects of the problem to be solved. First I shall give reasons for thinking that generalisations are, in a sense, more fundamental than applications; and then I shall try to point out the various elements of the problem of generalisations.

It seems to me that applications are to be analysed partly in terms of generalisations. Thus it seems to me that the analysis of if you go out you will get wet, for instance, is on the lines of [you will get wet is entailed by you will go out together with certain facts about the circumstances (that rain is falling, and so on) and certain causal laws]. But only on those lines, not exactly that; for people who use applications usually know what they mean, but do not usually know exactly what causal laws and facts about circumstances would entail the consequence they are asserting. The analysis might perhaps be of the form [if p then q] means [there is some set of facts or other about present circumstances, and some set or other of causal laws, such that they together with p entail q]. I believe that there is a causal law (with some character or other) must be analysed a generalisation could be found (with the corresponding character) which would be true, or correct.



If this is so, then according to either analysis the sense in which applications have meaning will have to be analysed in terms of the sense in which generalisations have meaning; since the meaning of an application will either include the meaning of some generalisation, or will include reference to the possibility of finding a generalisation, that is, a propositional sign with the type of meaning that generalisations have.

Consider a fairly straightforward generalisation, say all kittens are restless, or all books are made of paper - the latter because it may be as well to keep a false generalisation in mind. In a way one can see how such a propositional sign can be derived from a naming sign, in the same sort of way in which a hiative sign can be derived from a naming sign which would be a closer of it. The meaning of all kittens are restless obviously has some relation or other to the meaning of this kitten is restless - a relation which one expresses in unanalytic terms by saying that the former will be true if the latter is always true, or is true of all kittens. Now the nature of the meaning of this kitten is restless has been approximately analysed, in terms of the applicative regularity of two names, this kitten and is restless, and of the primary structural regularity of the whole propositional sign: the analysis is, of

course, only a sketch, since it treats the sign as having two, instead of four, significant parts; but it is an approach to an analysis. We might express the additional problem by using the expression [this kitten is restless would be true of every kitten], and then saying that it is the nature of the meaning of the unitalicised part that has to be analysed. The generalisation obviously contains two parts - kitten and restless - which have applicative regularity in some sense, though not strictly in the sense which has been defined. It is clear that there is some sense or other in which these words are correlated with elements of the world, and in which this and is are not, though in my very general sense of element they are. In this other limited sense it may be said that such words as all, this, is, are, show the place in the world of the elements named. But this unfortunately carries one no nearer to the analysis which is required: one of the forms of the present question would be, what is the analysis of [all is used to show the place of elements in the world] ?

I think the problem is to be approached on these lines, which I can not at present make at all definite. A sense must be found in which such words as kitten and restless and rain and stop and between and so on have applicative regularity, as distinct from phrases like



this kitten or has stopped. This may be called the applicative regularity of names (in a new sense of name). Then another quite different sense must be found in which one would speak of the applicative regularity of expressions of the form this—is, the—is, these—are, this is a, and so on. This, which may be called primary applicative regularity of formal units, would consist of correlations between the expression this—is and the holding in some situation of the characterising relation between some one object and a characterising object; and so on for the rest of the formal units referred to. Then certain other formal units would be pointed out, such as all—are, —is always, most—are, about which the first thing to be said would be that they had not got primary applicative regularity. I think the difficulties in defining the applicative regularity of names, and of formal units like this—is, which we may call primary formal units, would not be very great - the question can probably be treated on the lines followed in section 7. If this treatment were successful, the resulting analysis would be well on the way to the multiplicity of actual syntax.

The most obviously hopeful method of approaching the meaning of what may be called secondary formal units,

such as all— are—, every—is—, depends on the assumption that generalisations are more often than not used truly; a comparable assumption has been made for propositional signs which are not generalisations, but I do not know whether in the present case it is so plausible. If the assumption is made, an analysis might be constructed as follows. Suppose the gaps in all— are— are filled by units which are names in the new sense: I shall symbolise by  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  the names which might fill these gaps. Then for all values of  $\phi$  and  $\psi$ ,  $\boxed{\text{all}\phi\text{ are }\psi}$  means that all  $\phi$  are  $\psi$ , and  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  are names (in the new sense) ] means that  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  have the applicative regularity of names, and most of the names which have filled the first and second gaps in all— are— have been such that all the objects named by the first have also been objects named by the second.

This is a mere sketch of an analysis. It is also open to two objections which deserve consideration. First, is it not circular to analyse the nature of the meaning of all— are— in such a way that all occurs in the analysing expression (occurs outside the square brackets)? I think it is not circular. For what is being analysed is not all, but meaning in the sense in which all has meaning. The objection could fairly be made if mean occurred after means that outside the square



brackets, and did so in the sense under consideration. A similar objection might have been made to the definitions in section 9, but I think there the defence would be exactly the same. On the other hand it is possible that a proper analysis of all would lead one to modify the type of analysis which is proposed for this sense of meaning, and I admit that I am not entirely comfortable about this point.

Secondly, this analysis of meaning involves a partial analysis of all. It contains the words 'the names which have filled the first and second gaps in all—are— have been such that all the objects named by the first have also been objects named by the second'. This expression attributes two very questionable characters to a generalisation: first, that it relates to absolutely all the objects which have been of a certain kind, not merely those which have been observed or observable; second, that it relates only to those objects of that kind which have existed in the past. The first of these characters I think generalisations do possess in some sense or other, but probably in rather a different sense from that in which it may be said that a naming sign relates to the objects named; and it is not clear exactly what this different sense is. The second character most generalisations certainly do not



possess; they clearly relate to the future just as much as to the past. They express rules by which we shall always continue to be guided, unless they are overthrown: compare Ramsey's language (general propositions and causality p. 241); 'variable hypotheticals ... form the system with which the speaker meets the future', they 'are not judgments but rules for judging "If I meet a  $\phi$ , I shall regard it as a  $\psi$ "'. It appears, then, that the way in which generalisations relate to unobserved cases, and the way in which they relate to the future as much as to the past, are parts of the problem of the analysis of generalisations. This analysis is not properly to be demanded of those who are analysing meaning, although it may be necessary to leave a gap or an obscurity in an analysis of meaning until the analysis of generalisations has been found. Ramsey's paper from which I have just quoted seems to me to throw a good deal of light on the question of generalisations, but I have not been able to extract from it an analysis of generalisations which can be clearly stated.

The above sketch is a sketch of the analysis of what may be called secondary applicative regularity of formal units. It would also be necessary to define secondary structural regularity, the character which will constitute the meaning of propositional signs of

such forms as all—are; and to extend the analysis of meaning in the sense in which it is possessed by all—are so as to include every—is, —is always, most—are, and so on, and expressions in other languages. For secondary structural regularity two systems would have to be found of a rather more complicated type than those which gave rise to primary structural regularity. Naming signs (which could now be defined as those consisting only of names in the new sense and primary formal units) as a rule have a number of correlative modes each of which enters separately into the relative situation-system, and each of which is connected in a special way with the meaning of the token to which it is correlative. But no modes are related to generalisations in the way in which correlative modes are related to naming signs; and a generalisation, if it does not happen to be ambiguous, is true either on all occasions of its use or on none. But a number of modes can be found each of which may be said to be an instance of a given generalisation; each of these is related to every occasion of use of the generalisation in exactly the same way. Thus the generalisation all kittens are restless is related in a certain way to a number of modes, each consisting of a kitten behaving restlessly, and is true (if it is true) because all



these modes have occurred and because there has been no kitten whose life story has not included a good deal of restless behaviour. Similarly there are certain modes related in the same way to all pigs are dirty, and so on. The modes in question, for any generalisation of the form all  $\phi$  are  $\psi$ , are those such that it would be logically possible for them to be correlative modes of this  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ . The whole set for a given generalisation may be called the positive grounds for that generalisation (they are not of course all grounds in the ordinary sense, for some are unknown). All the positive grounds for a given generalisation obviously have some common element. Similarly all the propositional tokens of a given generalisation have something in common, namely the type of which they are tokens. The common element and the type are of course logical constructions from the individual positive grounds and tokens. None the less there is no objection to speaking of a system made up of the common elements of all sets of positive grounds of true generalisations, and a system made up of the type propositional signs which are the generalisations themselves. These two systems will have the same structure, and in terms of this identity of structure secondary structural regularity may be defined - then meaning in the sense in which it belongs to generalisations might

be fully analysed on the same lines as meaning in the sense in which it belongs to naming signs.

The negative element in the meaning of hypotheticals will be referred to in the next section.

not see how to analyse meaning in the sense in which negative propositional signs have meaning. As a result all the analyses of the meaning of propositional signs suggested so far are imperfect, the least imperfect being, I think, the analysis of the meaning of relative signs. Both naming signs and generalizations involve in their analysis negative signs, and consequently the analysis of meaning in the sense in which they have meaning involves an explanation of the relation between the signs and whatever it is that constitutes the negative part of their meaning. Thus, all tigers are dangerous may perhaps be analysed quite simply as there are no tigers which are not dangerous and will not be anything which is a tiger and is not dangerous (in case of course the generalizing aspect is not analysed); if more complicated analysis is found, involving a relation between the generalization and its positive grounds, there will still have to be a clause taking account of the negative grounds (and these are all the tigers there have been, that is, and nothing else has been a tiger). When naming signs have first



## 14 Negation

There remains one of the types of generality mentioned in section 10 which has not been dealt with. I have no analysis of negation to offer, and in consequence I do not see how to analyse meaning in the sense in which negative propositional signs have meaning. As a result all the analyses of the meaning of propositional signs suggested so far are imperfect, the least imperfect being, I think, the analysis of the meaning of hiative signs. Both naming signs and generalisations involve in their analysis negative signs, and consequently the analysis of meaning in the sense in which they have meaning involves an explanation of the relation between the signs and whatever it is that constitutes the negative part of their meaning. Thus, all tigers are dangerous may perhaps be analysable quite simply as there has not been and will not be anything which is a tiger and is not dangerous (in this of course the generalising aspect is not analysed); if some more complicated analysis is found, involving a relation between the generalisation and its positive grounds, there will still have to be a clause taking account of the negative grounds (and these are all the tigers there have been, that is, and nothing else has been a tiger). When naming signs were first



under consideration, in section 9, they were treated as divisible wholly into names, in a primitive sense. But as soon as it becomes necessary to take account of formal units it also becomes necessary to take account of the fact that definite descriptions are involved: definite descriptions do not usually claim to relate to an object which is absolutely the only instance of its kind, but they are always, nevertheless, limited by some negative clause. The analysis of the kitten is restless does not of course contain the clause nothing else has ever been a kitten, but it does contain some such clause (as has been suggested in section 9) as there is no other kitten to which we are attending.

The analysis of negation would be superficially simpler in terms of facts than in terms of modes. For in terms of facts one can speak of negative facts, and relations between them and negative signs. It is a mistake to object to this procedure on the ground that there are no negative facts. There are negative facts, for there are negative sentences which are true, that is, which express facts; the word fact is used in such a way that facts may be negative. The objection to which the procedure may be open is that negative facts are not fundamental, that is, that there are negative facts can be analysed in a form which does not involve a negative.

I find myself prone to think that this is so, though I do not know how the analysis is to be carried out: I have already said that I think that facts are not fundamental, but I must make clear that I think also that the negativity of negative facts is probably analysable - the analysis will not merely transfer it from the facts to something else (judgments, for instance) which is negative in a different but systematically connected sense.<sup>6</sup>

In the absence of an analysis of negation I do not see how to analyse the nature of the meaning of negative propositional signs.

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<sup>6</sup> It would be worth while to have a special name for the way in which negation is alleged to be analysable. It is claimed that if negative expressions are used at several levels, in Wisdom's sense (logical constructions IV, Mind Jan. 1933 pp.53-4), then there is no level at which they are used such that in that use they can not be analysed wholly in non-negative terms, although some levels may be partly analysable in terms of others. If this is so, one may say that negation is finally analysable. Compare extension, according to the Mill-Russell type of theory: the extension of physical objects would be analysable in terms of the extension of sense-data, but extension would not be finally analysable. The finally analysable is said to disappear in analysis.



## 15 The meaning of language in general.

The expressions the nature of whose meaning has so far been considered have been only a limited class selected from all the types of expression we use: they have been confined to the expressions which could occur in what I have called a language of observation, and those that differ from them only by the presence of negation or hypothesis. Obviously a great deal of any language in use among civilised people has been left out. The most conspicuous omissions are, I think, of expressions which relate to abstractions and those which relate to mental events (this classification is not very exact). There seem to be two possible ways of completing the analytical scheme which has been outlined. The missing parts of language can be included either by showing that meaning in the sense in which they have meaning can be analysed in terms of meaning in one of the senses whose analysis has already been considered, or by giving special analyses of the nature of the meaning of expressions relating to abstractions and to mental events. It seems to me possible to adopt the first alternative for abstractions, but I am doubtful whether or not it will meet the case of mental events. First I shall try to point out what I mean by abstractions, and the sort of way in which I think the meaning of the words standing for them is

related to the senses of meaning already considered.

I mean by words standing for abstractions such words as tendency, influence, probability, causation, chance, space, number (in some uses), frequency, repetition; and as nature, humanity, animality, and so on; and certain verbs and adjectives connected with these nouns. I think all the words and other expressions of this class can be analysed by means of a language of observation and the types of generality which have been discussed. It might, of course, be maintained that there are expressions which are not of any of the types so far considered, cannot be analysed by means of them, and do not relate to mental events: but I do not think that this is so, unless there are mathematical expressions which fulfil this condition - with mathematical expressions I do not profess to deal. I am assuming then that, apart from expressions of mathematics (and formal logic), there are no expressions which are not either of one of the types so far considered, or capable of being analysed by means of expressions of one of those types, or expressions relating to mental events. I shall suggest that if an expression can be analysed by means of one of the types of expression with which I have dealt, then the nature of the meaning of that expression can be analysed in terms of the nature of the meaning of one of the types with which I have dealt. I can make



the suggestion clearer by constructing an example.

Suppose I want to analyse tendency, I may examine such a sentence as the rat tends to get through the maze more quickly: as an analysis of tend in this use I may suggest that the rat tends to get through the maze more quickly means that each time the rat gets through the maze, after the first, it gets through it quicker. I think this is approximately the right analysis, but whether it is or not does not matter for the present purpose. The question that has to be answered is, what is the analysis of means, as it would occur in such an analysis as is given above? I suggest that means in this sense can be analysed in terms of meaning in the senses discussed in my earlier sections; and I will try to give an outline of the way in which it would be analysed.

The general linguistic form of propositional signs relating to tendency in this sense may be symbolised the  $\phi$  tends to do  $\psi$  (I call this the general form because I think it illustrates in the simplest way the lines on which all the propositional signs in question could be dealt with). The analysis of the general form would be [ the  $\phi$  tends to do  $\psi$  means that the  $\phi$  does  $\psi$  more and more ]. The analysis of means in this sense: [ the  $\phi$  tends to do  $\psi$  means that the



$\phi$  does  $\psi$  more and more, and  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  are names] means that  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  have the applicative regularity of names, and most of the names which have filled the gaps in the — tends to do — have been such that the object named by the first (and identified by the) has gone through the process named by the second more and more. An objection might be made to such an analysis on the ground of circularity, because more and more occurs in the analysing expression; but I think such an objection would be unfounded, and is to be met in the way suggested in section 13 for the analysis of the meaning of hypotheticals.

It would be unsatisfactory if a different analysis had to be given for the meaning of every abstraction, but the foregoing analysis can easily be generalised, on some such lines as these: [ $f(x^1 - x^n)$  means that  $g(x^1 - x^n)$ , and  $x^1 - x^n$  are names, and  $g$  is either a name or a primary or secondary formal unit, and  $f$  is neither a name nor a primary or secondary formal unit] means that  $x^1 - x^n$  and  $g$  have applicative regularity (of the appropriate type), and  $f$  has not got applicative regularity (of any type so far discussed), and most of the names which have filled the gaps in  $g(- - -)$  have been such that the objects named by them have been related in the way indicated by  $g$  and the placing of the names. The question whether, apart from expressions meaning mental objects, ~~the expressions~~

~~stands meaning mental objects~~, all expressions which are not of any type dealt with in my earlier sections can be analysed by means of expressions which are of one of those types, may be expressed in terms of this analysis: it is the question whether for every expression which could take the place of f above some g can be found which satisfies the conditions stated in the analysis.

The analysis given above (if it were fully worked out) would define the sense in which a certain class of propositional units had meaning. We might say that a unit satisfying the conditions satisfied by f above had tertiary applicative regularity; and we should proceed to define tertiary structural regularity (giving the syntax of propositional signs involving abstractions) on the lines which have been suggested in section 13 for secondary structural regularity. My view of the nature of the meaning of all propositional signs not relating to mental objects may be summed up by saying that I think they all have either primary or secondary or tertiary structural regularity.

Next allowance must be made for mental objects. On this point I think the analysis of meaning awaits the analysis of mental and other similar words, that is, I think different accounts of what constitutes the



meaning of expressions relating to mental objects must be given for different analyses of the expressions themselves. I think there are two relevant alternatives, behaviouristic and non-behaviouristic. Either every propositional sign relating to a mental object can be analysed wholly in terms of observable modes or not. If the former alternative is true, every propositional sign relating to a mental object will have either primary or secondary or tertiary structural regularity, and there will be no special problem of the nature of the meaning of these propositional signs.

If on the other hand the completely behaviouristic analysis of all statements involving mental factors is not correct ——— and it is a very paradoxical analysis, which has never, I think, been fully worked out ——— the nature of the meaning of these statements is certainly a quite separate problem. All the analyses given here, whether they have been given in detail or in outline, have been wholly in terms of what is observable: they have either been in terms of observable relations between expressions and other objects, or built up from analyses which were in those terms. It is natural to think that such objects as an act of judgment or memory, a pain, an impulse, a feeling of longing,

and so on, are not observable in anything like the sense in which a bodily movement, a smell, or a shout, is observable. A behaviouristic philosopher would regard this as a mistake: he would have to maintain, roughly, that propositional signs in which pain, for instance, occurred, were to be analysed in terms of the observable happenings which would ordinarily be described as signs of the occurrence of pain, or evidence for its occurrence.

If the behaviouristic analysis is not correct, meaning, in the sense in which designations or descriptions of mental objects have meaning, will have to be analysed on radically different lines from those that I have followed. I do not know what the correct analysis would be, but I think it would have to take account of the philosophical problems of the nature of understanding (as a mental process), and the nature of the inference (or whatever it is) by which the existence of mental events is inferred from physical signs.

My outline of an analysis of meaning is now concluded. Apart from omissions and vagueness, it is imperfect formally, I am sorry to say, in two serious ways: it does not take account of the existence of ambiguity (many senses for one expression) or of alternative syntactical forms (many expressions for one sense), and, although names and various types of formal unit are distinguished,



it has not got the multiplicity of actual syntax. Names and formal units correspond roughly to parts of speech. But an ideal syntax would certainly involve far more parts of speech (not necessarily those in grammar books), the use of inflexions and connecting words (relative pronouns, conjunctions, and so on), the various types of compound sentence, and many other refinements.

propositional sign in the sentence in which I was analysing meaning, the phrase should not also be understood in this sense. [  $\bar{p}$  is a propositional sign ] . In the sense which I originally gave the phrase, and in which it is in general proper to use it, say be analysed; [  $\bar{p}$  has either primary or secondary or auxiliary structural regularity (or the character which belongs to those signs which relate to formal words, supposing that be different) ] . Then, when propositional sign occurred in, for instance, a definition of primary structural regularity, it might be more convenient to use a different sense, so that circularity in the definition of propositional sign in the regular sense might be avoided.

The circularity would then have been avoided at the expense of introducing a qualification which might be avoided. It is true that the qualification might have been avoided but the difficulty would have been pointed out that the qualification was not needed.

## 16 The meaning of propositional sign.

It has been convenient to use the phrase propositional sign inconsistently. I began, in section 2, by pointing out in unanalytic terms the expressions I proposed to call propositional signs - namely sentences which are not questions, requests or commands, and other symbolic expressions used to make statements. But when I used propositional sign in the sections in which I was analysing meaning, the phrase should not have been understood in this sense. [ p is a propositional sign ] , in the sense which I originally gave the phrase, and in which it is in general proper to use it, may be analysed: [ p has either primary or secondary or tertiary structural regularity (or the character which belongs to those signs which relate to mental events, supposing that is different) ] . Thus, when propositional sign occurred in, for instance, a definition of primary structural regularity, it ought to have been used in a different sense, so that circularity in the definition of propositional sign in the regular sense might be avoided.

The circularity could have been avoided at the expense of introducing a complication whose tiresomeness would have outweighed the gain in accuracy. It could have been pointed out that among spoken and written



expressions certain obvious divisions are to be found - in writing, the division made by a full stop, in speech, the division made by certain types of pause. Then it would have been possible to say that each of the groups of words so separated was to be called a sentence, and that certain sentences would presently be shown to have a certain additional character on account of which they would be called propositional signs, and which they would be found to share with some objects which were not sentences (for instances glasses on dishes). I thought it more convenient to use from the start a phrase which would identify all those and only those expressions with which I was concerned. But strictly speaking propositional sign should be analysed in terms of the analysis of meaning of which an outline has been given.

# 17 Reflexivity of the foregoing analysis.

I think the cause of the appearance of circularity which some of the analyses here suggested have is that many of them actually have a rather different character, which may be called reflexivity, or at any rate they approximate to reflexivity. An analysis is reflexive if in some sense it applies to itself. It is obvious that analyses of meaning and of generality are likely to have this character. In every analysis of the type with which I am concerned the link between the analysed expression and the analysing expression is means or means that. If some expression, p, is being analysed in respect of means as it occurs in p, then if the link between p and an analysing expression q is means in the sense in which it occurs in p, or in an allied sense, an analysis in the same form as q has, or in a similar form, could be given of this occurrence of means. Thus an endless series of analyses would be generated, of the form  $[[ [ p \text{ means } q ] \text{ means } r ] \text{ means } s ] \text{ means } \dots$  In this series r would be the result of the application of the analysis of means to the first occurrence of means, s the result of the application of the analysis to the second occurrence, and so on. An analysis of generality is reflexive in a slightly different way. If the analysis of some sense of generality has the form



[ [ p is general (in sense n) ] means that q ], it is very likely that this whole sentence is itself general in sense n. Then a series, endless like the first, can be generated in this way. Supposing we call the whole analysing sentence an<sup>1</sup>, then an<sup>1</sup> is general in sense n. We apply the analysis to [ an<sup>1</sup> is general in sense n ], and the resulting analysis may be called an<sup>2</sup>. But an<sup>2</sup> will also be general in sense n; the analysis of this statement will be an<sup>3</sup>; and so on. In point of fact all my analyses have been, I think, both hypothetical and latently, if not openly, hiative. Thus all the analyses of generality have presumably been reflexive in the sense pointed out; and some at least of my analyses of the meaning of propositional signs have probably been reflexive.

Is this reflexivity objectionable? It seems to me not. Suppose one of my analyses of referential meaning is that [ p means that q ] means that r; and suppose that the second means is being used in the same sense as the first. Then the following points seem to me clear.

(1) From the fact that the analysis is reflexive it does not follow that it is circular: it would only be circular if r contained some expression in respect of which [ p means that q ] was supposed to be analysed. (2) Two purposes may be distinguished which the finding of an analysis is intended to serve; they may be called the

logical and the psychological purpose. The logical purpose is to find an analysing expression which has the same meaning as another expression and which also has the formal character (whatever it may be) which distinguishes an analytical definition from other kinds. The psychological purpose is not to cause the analyst to understand what is analysed - he understands it already - but to cause him to understand it more clearly (or with more insight, as wisdom would say). (3) In the special case of analysing propositional meaning an endless series of analyses can be generated. But the logical purpose is only to reach the first stage in this series, since the first stage will satisfy the formal conditions of analysis. The psychological purpose is realised (on the assumption that the analysis is correct) when the analyst, considering  $[[p \text{ means that } q] \text{ means that } r]$ , gains improved insight into means in both its occurrences simultaneously. When this happens, he sees that it is logically possible to carry on the series of analyses for ever. But he would not improve his insight or clarify his understanding by advancing to any further stage.

Similarly the logical purpose of the analysis of generality is realised when the first analysis<sup>out</sup> of the possible series is given. The psychological purpose is realised when the analyst sees that the analysis of



generality (n) is as stated, and at the same time sees that the total analysing expression is general (n). His understanding would not be improved if he proceeded to the stage symbolised by an<sup>2</sup>.

## 18 solipsism

The type of solipsism which is now current, and is sometimes called methodological solipsism, together with the accompanying principle known as the principle of verifiability, certainly has an important connexion with the analysis of meaning in the sense in which one speaks of the meaning which an expression has for a particular person. I want to consider whether it has any bearing on the analysis of what is called ordinary meaning, whether, that is, its truth or falsity would affect that analysis. This type of solipsism emanates principally from Wittgenstein, and I shall consider a brief statement of Wittgenstein's solipsism given by R. B. Braithwaite (Analysis 1, 1, p. 14): 'it does not deny that you are having toothache (under the circumstances when you would ordinarily be said to have toothache), but it does deny that the analysis of this proposition is essentially similar to that of the proposition that I am having toothache' (that Wittgenstein would accept this statement is, of course, too much to hope, but what I am concerned with is the point of view stated, and not whether Wittgenstein adopts it).

This, like most other statements of solipsism, is given in a very puzzling form. In the ordinary way, if the question were asked, what is the analysis of, for



instance, I have toothache? it would be taken to mean what is the analysis of that sentence as it would ordinarily be used, and as it might be used by anyone on any occasion? One might then begin an analysis on these lines: a toothache is occurring now which is part of the series of mental events each of which is a part of my experience, or something of that kind. Then in analysing you have toothache one would use exactly the same formula except that your would be substituted for my. But I think this is clearly not what Braithwaite wanted when he claimed that the analysis of his having toothache was not 'essentially similar' to the analysis of someone else's having it. What he wanted to claim was something like this: that, while the analysis of I (Braithwaite) am having toothache may be more or less as I have stated, the analysis of you (not Braithwaite) are having toothache would be quite different; perhaps physical phenomena are occurring which are members of the class of phenomena which I call signs of toothache and also members of the class of phenomena which I call appearances of you, or something like that. Thus he is not claiming that the analysis of I have toothache in its ordinary use is radically different from the analysis of you have toothache in its ordinary use, but that the analyses of the two expressions as he would use them are radically different.



Every methodological solipsist, if he expressed himself carefully, would therefore as a rule ask questions of the form [what is the analysis of p when I use p ?] And his account of the analysis of I have toothache, for instance, as used by somebody else, would I think have to be radically different from the analysis of any expression at all as used by himself. For his analysis of his own expressions would be of the form [by p I mean what I should mean by q]. Then the analysis of other people's expressions would have to be of the form [by p he means what I should mean by q]. He means, as used by the solipsist under consideration, would have a very complicated analysis, quite different from the analysis of I mean as used by him; it would be something like this: by [by p he means what I should mean by q] I mean that there has been an utterance of p which has been a member of the class of phenomena that I call appearances of him, and there have been certain phenomena in this class which have been what I call signs that he uses English in its ordinary sense, and what I should mean by p has a certain complex relation to what I should mean by q. Now if solipsism were correct I should have to give a very complicated explanation of this sort whenever I wanted to say anything about what Braithwaite meant. Thus, if I want to consider the hypothesis that solipsism is correct the easiest course

will be for me to try to adopt a solipsistic point of view myself.

What course do I adopt, if as a solipsist I try to analyse meaning in the sense in which we speak of ordinary meaning? Suppose I start by giving one of the analyses which occur in my earlier sections: say it is of the form  $[[a$  (a name) means  $a]$  means that  $a$  has a high degree of applicative correlation with  $a]$ . It was understood in my earlier sections that means that had the sense of would ordinarily be used to mean that, and the analysis of this sense was subsequently discussed, when I came to structural regularity. The existence of structural regularity involved that certain expressions had been used on a great number of occasions on which I might have been present or might not. Braithwaite (l.c.) writes 'to be a solipsism a philosophy must not only analyse propositions about another person's experiences in a different way from that in which it analyses propositions about my experiences but it must analyse them, and indeed all propositions, ultimately in terms of my experiences'. We may say, then, that as a solipsist I hold that every expression which does not ostensibly relate to my experiences is finally analysable. <sup>I express my opinion</sup> in this way. I say that by  $[p$  was used on occasions  $o^1 \dots o^n$  on which I was not present] I mean that phenomena have occurred (or perhaps always will occur) each of which has



been what would ordinarily be called a sign that there has been an occasion on which p has been used. Strictly speaking what would ordinarily be called presupposes the analysis here given, but there may be a solipsistic solution of this difficulty. I might say each of which has been a sign, explaining that by a sign I mean a phenomenon which has a certain observed character, not a phenomenon which has a certain relation to something unobserved.

By the process here sketched a solipsist can, I think, appropriate an analysis of the type that I have been putting forward. He takes the analysing expressions and submits them to a further process, which may be called private analysis. Speaking again as a solipsist, I think I can distinguish just as easily as a non-solipsist between a public analysis and a private analysis. The difference is pointed out, of course, when I say that the analyses of meaning in this essay are public analyses, and the process just described would be a process of private analysis. But it can also be defined. I say (as a solipsist) that an analysis is public if when it is completed the analysing expression (after means or means that) still contains expressions which do not ostensibly relate to my experience, and it is private if it consists of the analysis of the results of a public analysis in terms of my experience. The expression ostensibly relate to my experience would



of course, have to be analysed, and I do not know which type of analysis this would be.

Braithwaite, in the paper from which I have quoted, claims (p.14) that if a solipsistic theory, instead of asserting propositions incompatible with the common sense view of the world, propounds analyses of those proportions, it can not be rejected as contrary to common sense. I think this claim is misleading. For all the analyses that we ask for and consider, except when we are considering <sup>are public analyses. Braithwaite, by saying that solipsism</sup> solipsism, merely proposes an analysis of common sense propositions, suggests that it offers something which is an analysis in the same sense as the analyses we usually consider. But in point of fact it is not, since it is not a public but a private analysis.

Thus it seems to me that I can have no objection, while posing as a solipsist, to the types of analysis which are given in this essay, though I think it necessary to go beyond them in a certain way, by adding a private analysis. On the other <sup>hand,</sup> it is impossible for a non-solipsist to admit that he agrees with a solipsist about these analyses, or about anything else. For he knows that the solipsist believes that the public analyses are not final analyses, the final analyses being wholly in terms of the solipsist's own experience. Since the non-solipsist does not believe that all final analyses are in terms of some solipsist's

experience, there are scarcely any questions, if any, on which he can admit that he agrees with a solipsist.

Speaking as a solipsist, I of course claim that I do agree with all non-solipsists on many questions, ~~and~~ I have some complex private analysis of agreement.

Note 7. It may be worth while, even if it is not strictly relevant, to comment on another claim made by Braithwaite in the paper from which I have quoted (solipsism and 'the common sense view of the world', Analysis 1,1.). He claims that solipsism is an analysis, not a denial, of common sense propositions. This claim has already been noticed. He draws the natural inference that solipsism is compatible with common sense, and this way of formulating the point makes it possible to consider it in another aspect.

Consider the solipsistic analysis (private analysis of course) of some historical statement - almost any ordinary statement would do, but this gives a striking illustration: consider Caesar crossed the Rubicon. Speaking from a non-solipsistic point of view, I should say that, roughly speaking a solipsist analyses this in terms of what would ordinarily be called his grounds <sup>for</sup> believing that Caesar crossed the Rubicon. Speaking as a solipsist, I say something like this: by Caesar crossed the Rubicon I mean that I have come across certain printed statements in books stated to be by



Mommsen, J. Caesar, and so on, which have had the verbal form Caesar crossed the Rubicon, or some verbal form with the same ordinary meaning (see my analysis of ordinary meaning), and I have come across certain phenomena which I call Roman remains, codices, coins, and so on, and all these phenomena together have the complex character which I call being good grounds for believing that Caesar crossed the Rubicon (a character defined wholly in terms of relations between items in my experience); or perhaps, in a more sophisticated analysis, I mean that my future experience will confirm the hypothesis that I have experienced the grounds for belief just stated (experience being used in a different sense about the past from that in which it is used about the future).

Speaking as a non-solipsist, I think it is clear that there is something very paradoxical in claiming that the above statement gives an analysis in the ordinary sense of analysis (for, as has been said, I find it impossible to agree with a solipsist if he is claiming that his private analyses are analyses of the ordinary senses of expressions; but an analysis in the ordinary sense is of the ordinary sense of an expression). But the point I want to raise now is whether it can possibly be claimed that such an analysis as the above is compatible with

common sense. It can only be compatible or incompatible with common sense if it is a matter of common sense that anyone (whether or not he is a solipsist) means a certain thing by Caesar crossed the Rubicon. The common sense view can be expressed crudely by saying that anyone using the words in their ordinary senses means by this that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, and anyone using in their ordinary senses the words I have experienced certain pieces of evidence means by <sup>this</sup> that he has experienced those pieces of evidence. The question is, then, is it contrary to common sense to suppose that Caesar crossed the Rubicon has, in its ordinary sense, the same meaning as some expression like I have experienced certain pieces of evidence (though not exactly that)? It seems to me that it clearly is contrary to common sense.

Braithwaite's general point of view could, of course, be saved, if he maintained that solipsism is neither compatible nor incompatible with common sense, in that to claim compatibility for it does not make sense.



## 19 Reasons for undertaking the foregoing analysis.

I have now concluded my sketch of the analysis of meaning. It has been pointed out by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (the meaning of meaning, cap. VIII) that the words mean and meaning have been constantly used, with little explanation by modern philosophers. In particular, the words are of the utmost importance for the analytical school or group of modern philosophers (the school of Moore, Russell, Broad, Stebbing, Wisdom, Wittgenstein, and so on, if they would consent to be called a school), because they are constantly asking for the analysis of some expression, proposition, or fact, and when they find it frequently give it in the form of a statement about the meaning of some expression. A good deal has been implied, here and there, about the nature of meaning, by Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, and others, and above all by Wisdom, but none of them has set out to analyse meaning. In general the need does not arise; that is, when people discuss whether or not some expression does give the meaning of a certain other they generally understand one another pretty well. Occasionally, however, a critic says 'but what is this meaning of the sentence, on which your analysis turns'; and, although it is possible to answer 'you know perfectly

well', it is desirable for the request for a definition to be met. I wish I felt certain that it has been adequately met here. I can not claim, however, to have done much more than reveal various aspects of the problem. It seems to me certain that an analysis of meaning must allow for some vocabulary element, which will have formal properties not unlike those of my applicative regularity, and some syntax element, with formal properties not unlike those of my structural regularity. That in some sort of way language, even the most depraved ordinary language, is a system which approximates to identity of structure with what it expresses, I am sure. But I do not know whether the relations involved are precisely those that I have put forward.



## Appendix

In this appendix I give in non-verbal symbols equivalents of some of the definitions which have been given in words in the earlier sections.

### 20 (see section 7)

The analysis of denotational meaning can be symbolised fairly briefly. First I shall symbolise perfect correlation between a propositional unit and an object.

Symbols	
$a$ etc	= variable units.
$d$ etc	= variable unit tokens.
$dTa$	= $d$ is a token of the type $a$ .
$x, y$ etc	= variable objects.
$xSy$	= $x$ resembles $y$ , or is an instance of a type of object of which $y$ is also an instance, or is the same object.
$dCx$	= $d$ is an element of a situation of which $x$ is also an element.
$R'(-)$ etc	= variable propositional signs.
$R'(a)$ etc	= $a$ is part of the sign $R'(-)$ .
$R'(d)$ etc	= the token $d$ is part of some propositional token of the type $R'(-)$ .
$(\exists R')$ etc	= there is a propositional sign $R'(-)$ such that....
$v$	= or.

Then,  $(a, x)$ :  $a$  means  $x$  (when this is some sign like [the rain means that])

$$\therefore (\exists R^1, R^2): R^1(a): R^2(a): \Delta Ta: R^1 \vee R^2(\Delta) \supset \Delta (\exists y). y Sx. \Delta Cy$$

This would symbolise the perfect case, in which a propositional ~~sign~~ unit is part of two different propositional signs, each of which has been used only in situations each of which has had as an element the object meant by the unit in question.

The imperfect case of a high degree of applicative correlation requires a rather more elaborate symbolisation (it is not essential to read this, as no important new principle is involved).

Symbols as above, and

$n, m, l, k, j$ , = variable numbers. ~~propositional signs~~

$(\exists \Delta [n])$  = there are  $n$   $\Delta$ 's such that . . . . .

Then,  $(a, x)$ :  $a$  means  $x$  . = .

$$(\exists R^1, R^2):: R^1(a):: R^2(a)::$$

$$(\exists n):: (\exists \Delta [n]): \Delta Ta: R^1(\Delta): (\exists y). y Sx. \Delta Cy::$$

$$(\exists m):: (\exists \Delta [m]): \Delta Ta: R^2(\Delta): (\exists y). y Sx. \Delta Cy::$$

$$(\exists \Delta [l]): \Delta Ta: R^1 \vee R^2(\Delta): \sim (\exists y). y Sx. \Delta Cy: \supset \Delta n + m > l$$

Strictly speaking, it should be shown that  $l$  may be zero, but  $n$  and  $m$  can not be.



21 (see section 8)

Symbolisation of the definition of identity of structure.

Symbols as in § 20, and

$S, S'$  etc = variable systems.

$\text{idst}(S, S')$  =  $S$  and  $S'$  have the same structure.

$f$  = variable relations.

$\frac{n}{f}$  = variable  $n$ -termed relations.

$f \in S$  =  $f$  occurs in  $S$ .

$f \in S [n]$  =  $f$  occurs in  $S$   $n$  times.

$f(x^n)$  =  $f$  has  $x$  as its  $n^{\text{th}}$  term.

$f(x)[n]$  =  $f$  has  $x$  as a term  $n$  times.

Then,  $(S, S') : \text{idst}(S, S') . \equiv$

$$(1) (\exists f [n]) . f \in S \equiv_n : (\exists f [n]) . f \in S'$$

$$(2) (\exists f [n]) . f \in S [m] : \equiv_{n,m} : (\exists f [n]) . f \in S' [m]$$

$$(3) (\exists \frac{n}{f} [n]) . \frac{n}{f} \in S . \frac{n}{f}(x^l)[k] : \equiv_{x,n,m,l,k} : (\exists \frac{n}{f} [n]) . \frac{n}{f} \in S' . \frac{n}{f}(x^l)[k]$$

$$(4) (\exists x [n]) : (\exists \frac{m}{f} [k]) . \frac{m}{f} \in S . \frac{m}{f}(x^k)[j] : \equiv_{n,m,l,k,j} :$$

$$(\exists x [n]) : (\exists \frac{m}{f} [k]) . \frac{m}{f} \in S' . \frac{m}{f}(x^k)[j]$$

I doubt whether this is the most economical presentation.